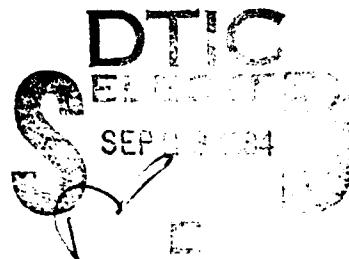


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APPENDICES

**MEASUREMENT OF  
UNIT EFFECTIVENESS  
IN  
MARINE CORPS  
INFANTRY BATTALIONS**

Cybernetics Technology Office  
DEFENSE ADVANCED RESEARCH PROJECTS AGENCY



Policy Sciences Division  
CACI, Inc.-Federal

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## APPENDICES

# MEASUREMENT OF UNIT EFFECTIVENESS IN MARINE CORPS INFANTRY BATTALIONS

OCTOBER 31, 1978

Cybernetics Technology Office  
DEFENSE ADVANCED RESEARCH PROJECTS AGENCY



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PREFACE

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This project was carried out under the sponsorship of the Cybernetics Technology Office of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency. The program managers from that office, initially Lt. Col. Roy Gulick (USMC), and, following his retirement, Dr. Stephen J. Andriole, contributed insight, guidance, and bureaucratic support in a helpful, timely, and effective manner.

The project was monitored by the Readiness Branch, Operations Division of Headquarters, United States Marine Corps. Col. Richard J. Johnson, the Contracting Officer's Technical Representative for all except the final few months of the research period, performed admirably in his role. He contributed intellectually to the effort both by raising issues in a timely fashion, and by prompt, thorough, and penetrating criticisms of drafts. He found the time in his otherwise busy schedule to act as an effective liaison for the project with the large number of interested officers and commands whose cooperation and understanding were essential in the effort. Col. Charles H. Knowles, who monitored the last few months of the contract, did so with interest and professionalism. His assistance is also greatly appreciated.

The research would have been nearly impossible if it had not been for the excellent professional assistance provided by the Marine Corps Historical Center. Brigadier General E. H. Simmons, Director of the Center, ensured that the fine research facilities there were fully available to the study team (even permitting access before the building was open to the public), and provided valuable insights and comments on the Phase I research report. Mr. Henry I. (Bud) Shaw helped the research team immeasurably by generously sharing his valuable firsthand familiarity with the historical materials. Ms. Bonnet, the Archives Secretary,

was also generous with her time and demonstrated great professionalism in locating relevant material in the vast and complex storage system. Individual scholars and researchers, pursuing their own projects in the archives, also provided valuable guidance and time saving bibliographic assistance to the research team. The spirit of scholarship present in the Center is truly impressive.

A special word of thanks is due to the 82 officers who invested time and energy to ensure high quality judgmental data in the research effort. They ranged in age and experience from lieutenants to retired lieutenant generals, but all participated gladly and gave professional attention to the tasks asked of them. A research effort is only as good as the information base on which it is constructed. This is particularly true when judgmental information is to be empirically aggregated. Contribution to this effort required long hours of work and deep concentration. These were provided cheerfully, and a number of valuable insights and suggestions were provided by officers who became involved in the study as judgmental coders. Their help is gratefully acknowledged.

Because of the complexity of the research tasks, the cooperation of a variety of military activities and installations was necessary if the project was to succeed. Cooperation from all the organizations and activities was exceptional and the number of individuals who went out of their way to help the research team learn more, gain greater access, and feel welcome was truly impressive.

A visit by the principal investigator to the base at Twenty-Nine Palms, California, provided valuable insight into the live fire exercises conducted there, as well as tactical concepts and procedures for evaluation. Personnel at the Marine Corps Air-Ground Combat Training Center (MCAGCTC) were most helpful and most skillful in explaining, clearly and in detail, the rationale and procedures utilized there.

Observation of a battalion exercise in preparation for deployment to the Mediterranean took the principal investigator to Camp Lejune, North Carolina, by way of the USS Iwo Jima from Norfolk, Virginia. U.S. Navy and Marine Corps personnel preparing for this important exercise were generous with their time in explaining the operation and the use of the Marine Corps Combat Readiness Evaluation System (MCCRES) in the field. Brigadier General McLernan, of the 2nd Marine Division, proved a most helpful host at Camp Lejune. Sessions with Major General E. J. Megarr, Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Training, provided further insight into the field exercise and the needs of the Marine Corps.

Officers participating in the coding effort came from a variety of sources, including a number of individual volunteers. However, visits were made to the Army War College, Naval War College (twice), the Education Center at Marine Corps Development Center (MCDEC), and the Amphibious Warfare School at Quantico, Virginia, where officers were available to work on the project. Cooperation at these institutions was exceptional and the research team was able to see new doctrine and tools such as the Tactical Warfare Simulation Analyses System, learn about the curriculum at each institute, and trade ideas and insights with faculty members.

Special thanks are due to Major General E. J. Megarr. His interest in serious research focused on real problems led him to provide special help such as formally inviting retired general officers in the Washington, D.C. area to participate in the program when it was needed.

The research team can only hope that the project to date has proven worthy of the extent and quality of assistance so cheerfully and professionally provided.

The principal investigator for the project is Dr. Richard E. Hayes, manager of CACI's Policy Sciences Division, who is also the principal author of this volume. The historical research and collection of judgmental

data were organized and directed by Maj Gen John J. Hayes, USA(Ret), whose military experience also contributed greatly to the project. Historical work was also undertaken by Dr. Paul Davis, COL, USA(Ret), and Messrs. William Harvey and Gary Keynon. Drs. Bertram I. Spector and David M. McCormick contributed heavily to the original questionnaire design and Mr. Harvey to their redesign for Phase II research. Mr. William Harvey took major responsibility for assembling the Phase I data set, and Dr. Farid Abolfathi executed most of the detailed, multivariate analyses. For Phase II, Dr. David McCormick initially structured the data, and analyses were carried out by Messrs. William Harvey and Steve Harvey. William Harvey performed the analyses of units over time and contributed insightful work in other sections.

The difficult and massive task of producing this report was handled with great skill by the Policy Sciences Division support staff, led by Ms. Kathy Harris. Text typing was largely handled by Karen Wolfe and tables by Briana Taravella. Mara Strock and Lisa Dueno cheerfully provided help whenever it was needed. Mr. James Schlotter did the technical editing under great time pressure.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**Narrative Descriptions of Engagements**

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ENGAGEMENT 23. BATTALION AMPHIBIOUS LANDING OPERATION, 3RD BN, 9TH MARINES,  
3RD MARINE DIVISION, IN THE EMPRESS AUGUSTA BAY-CAPE TOROKINA  
AREA, BOUGAINVILLE, NOVEMBER 1-8, 1943

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INTRODUCTION

This engagement describes the operations of the 3rd Battalion, 9th Marines, in a division-sized amphibious assault landing, through establishment and consolidation of the beachhead and a battle to repel and defeat a Japanese counter-landing force.

The sections of this engagement report and their subject matter are:

● General Preparation for the Engagement

This explains the grand strategy to which the Bougainville operation contributed, the general concept of the plan, the overall command organization for the landing, and the main considerations of terrain and enemy defense posture.

● Unit Background

This summarizes the organizing of the battalion, its incorporation into 9th Marines and 3rd Marine Division, and its pre-engagement experience, training, and rehearsal.

● Pre-Engagement Situation and Operations

This describes specifics of the planning and the landing scheme of maneuver and missions, as well as the naval, air, and diversionary operations immediately preceding the amphibious landing.

● The Engagement

This describes chronologically the operations of 3/9 and, pari passu, of adjacent and supporting units, from D-Day through D+8.

● After-Action Summary

This summarizes the achievement of objectives, obstacles encountered, and casualties suffered.

## GENERAL PREPARATION FOR THE ENGAGEMENT

### THE STRATEGY

With the seizure of islands in the Central Solomons, northwest of Guadalcanal, the stage was set for an advance to the Northern Solomons. The original Allied grand strategy of a single advance via New Guinea and the Philippine Islands had been replaced by a strategy of two parallel advances. The previous strategy would be paralleled by a main effort via the Central Pacific, starting with the Gilberts and the Marshall Islands. This had several advantages: avoiding extended operations on large land masses like New Guinea, stretching the Japanese defenses, and keeping them off-balance as the Allied strategic moves see-sawed between the two legs of the advance.

This change was accompanied by a new decision respecting Rabaul, New Britain. It would be isolated instead of attacked, and the Bougainville and Cape Gloucester operations would play major parts in doing so, as well as in neutralizing the "slot" between New Britain and New Guinea, the straits through which Japanese naval operations were severely impeding MacArthur's progress north.

A foothold was needed in the Northern Solomons for fighter bases close enough to bomb Rabaul, to engage fighters based there, and thus to support MacArthur's Cape Gloucester operation, which would take place in late December 1943.

The Bougainville operation, scheduled for November 1, came under Admiral Halsey. Discarding numerous North Solomons alternatives, he chose the Empress Augusta Bay-Cape Torokina area for the invasion of Bougainville. This area had several advantages. The first was surprise. Surprise was thought to be essential because Japanese air and naval forces in the area were strong. The exposed, turbulent waters and heavy tides, a shallow beach, and jungles and swamps close to the beach -- a beach far from ports and towns -- would enhance surprise. The Japanese in

fact would reject this as a possible site, and complete surprise would be achieved. Second, the approach of U.S. naval forces to the beaches along the South coasts of the Northern Solomons would reduce the risk of interceptions, compared to a main landing on Choiseul Island or the north coast of Bougainville (Map 1). Third, the land within the beach-head perimeter was flat. This would facilitate airstrip construction, a major aim of the landing.

To enhance surprise further, diversionary landings would take place at Choiseul and the Treasury Islands, both at D-5, and there would be no pre-D-Day bombing or naval gunfire at Cape Torokina.

#### THE LAND AND THE ENEMY

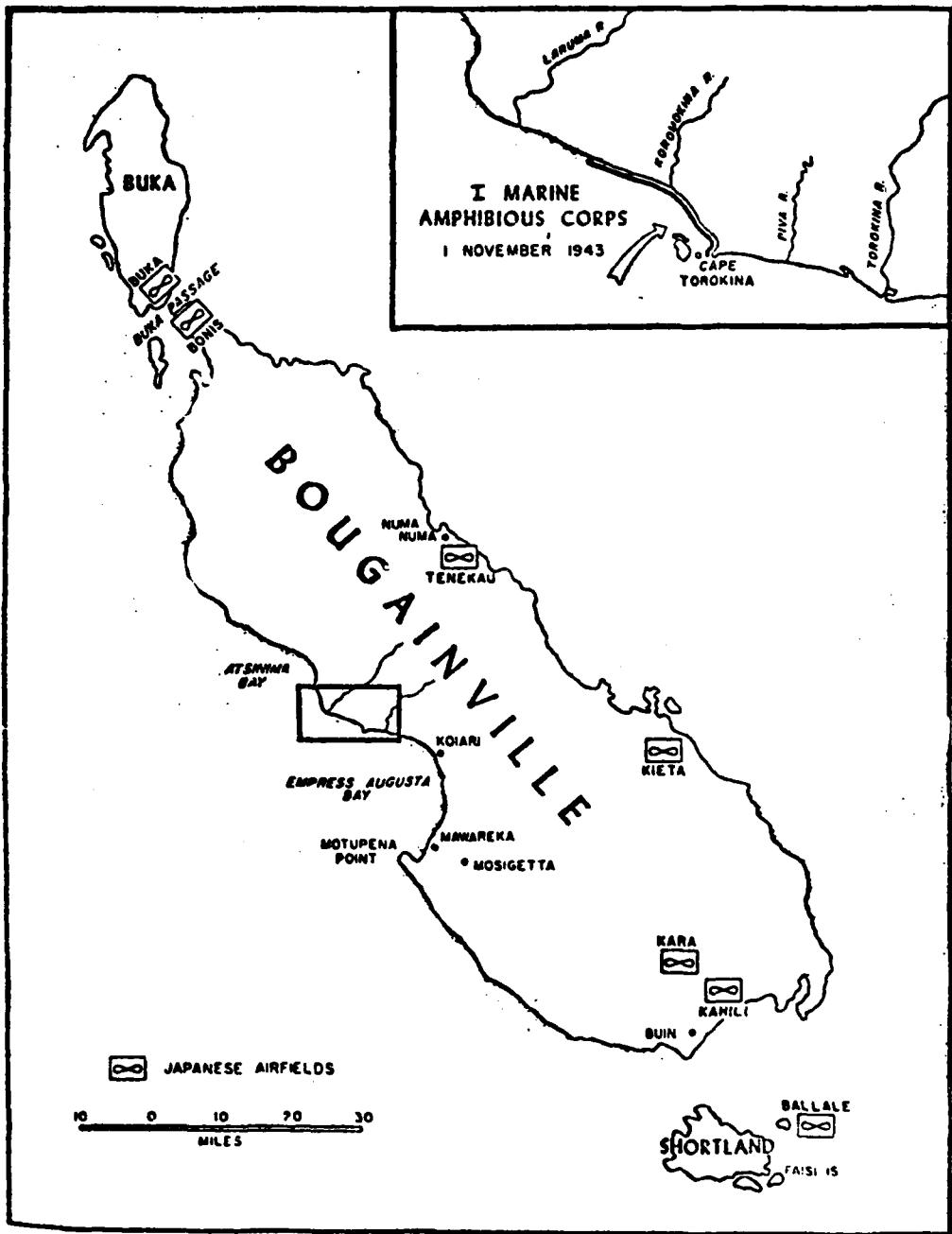
Bougainville is 125 miles long by 30 miles wide. A mountain range runs along its center. To the south, toward Cape Torokina, is a broad plain with plantations, but along the coast are large swamps and, immediately inland, heavy jungle. Anchorages are excellent, but the tides rough. The terrain would strongly impede Japanese reinforcements; but expansion from the beachhead toward the Japanese airbases and forces to the east would be through difficult terrain. The exact characteristics of water approaches, beach soil, and even swamps were unknown. The length of the beach was 10,000 feet.

Knowledge of enemy forces was limited and conflicting. Up to 17,000 Japanese troops of the Seventeenth Army were believed to be in the South, mainly at the eastern end of the island around Buin.<sup>1</sup> They had fought at Guadalcanal. There were three divisions: the almost destroyed 2d, the heavily depleted 38th, and the 6th Division, two regiments of which were still in fine shape.

Three hundred troops were believed to be in the Cape Torokina area; much larger forces than this would jeopardize the landing. Japanese

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, 15,000 troops were there.



MAP 1

plans envisioned that any Allied landings on Bougainville would take place at the eastern end near Buin, to seize the Japanese airfields. The Japanese planned amphibious counterlandings and strong beach defenses there, far to the east of Cape Torokina. Japanese naval forces near Bougainville were estimated as 2 cruisers, 8 to 10 destroyers, 12 submarines, and ample transports -- a reasonably accurate estimate, as events showed.

#### UNIT BACKGROUND

The 9th Marines were reactivated at Camp Elliott, California, February 12, 1942, drawing initial personnel (for 3/9, the first unit formed) from the Second Marines. Training began April 1. The regiment was severely depleted that summer, furnishing cadres to other Marine regiments. In August, it moved with one battalion of the 12th Marines (artillery) to Camp Pendleton. There it was brought to full strength and organized into 3 battalion landing teams with full attachments. On Christmas Eve, it became a formal part of the 3rd Marine Division. Regimental strength was about 3,000, attachments another 2500. After extensive small-unit training, it sailed for New Zealand, arriving February 5, 1942. 3/9 was then commanded by Lt Col. Robert Thaxton, an experienced officer. Upon Thaxton's promotion, Lt Col. Walter Asmuth, who commanded during the Torokina engagement, assumed command. Thus, the battalion had about 9 months in the theater before Cape Torokina, and its commanding officer about 5 months. The regimental commander was Col. Edward A. Craig. The 9th Marines was not as thoroughly trained for jungle warfare as its sister regiment, the 3rd, then the best trained of all Marine regiments in this type terrain.

Landing rehearsals of the 9th Marines were conducted October 21-25 (about 10 days before the landing) at Meli Bay, Fila, and Efate (New Hebrides). Separate rehearsals were held for the other regiments.

## PRE-ENGAGEMENT SITUATION AND OPERATIONS

### The Planning Situation

Under Admiral Halsey's overall direction, planning was carried out at Guadalcanal by the Task Force Commander, Vice Admiral Theodore S. Wilkinson and by the Commander of I Marine Amphibious Corps, Lieutenant General Alexander A. Vandegrift. The latter planned all land operations and assumed command of all ground forces after they landed.<sup>2</sup> The collocated 3rd Marines and 37th Army Infantry Division Headquarters took two months to plan the operation. 3rd Marine Division (Major General Allen H. Turnage commanding) would land D-Day, and additional battalion-size units would make the diversionary landings. Because resupply would be delayed 7 days for lack of shipping, initial supplies brought ashore were to be heavy. Between one-fourth and one-third of combat strength would aid on D-Day in unloading and sorting supplies.

The landing would be made on 11 beaches, two regiments abreast, the 9th on the left 5 beaches, the 3rd Marines on the right. 21st Marines would land about 6 days later. A battery of the 12th Marines would land with each BLT (Map 2).

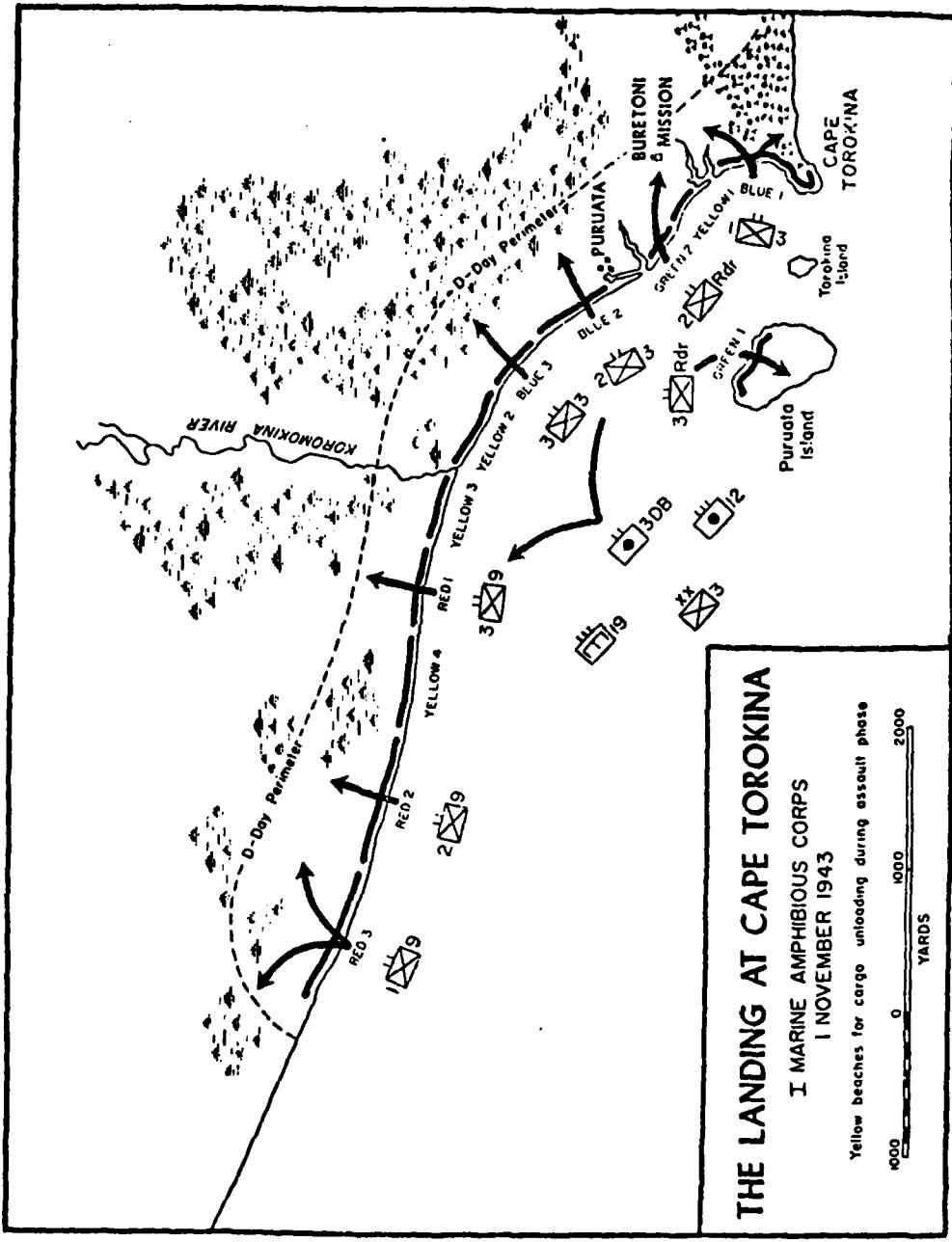
### MISSIONS

The 3rd Marine Division missions were:

- Establish a beachhead in the Cape Torokina area, ultimately about 2250 yards deep by 7350 yards long.
- Capture or destroy enemy forces in the area.
- Begin selection of airfield sites and construction of air strips.

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<sup>2</sup> He was replaced by Major General Roy S. Geiger on November 9, when General Vandegrift became Commandant of the Marine Corps.



MAP 2

- Establish long-range radar points and an advance naval base, including facilities for torpedo boats.
- Expand the beachhead on Corps order.

The mission of 3/9 was to: "land on Beaches YELLOW-3 and RED-1 at H-hour, advance inland, capture or destroy all Japanese forces encountered, seize and defend the general line O-1 in its zone of action (about 500 yards deep), in order to assist in the seizure and defense of the Force Beach Line."

There had been special naval gunfire training at Munda, New Georgia, to remedy problems of accuracy. However, the three destroyers assigned for the D-Day preparation had not been among these ships, and the ground observers trained there were not stationed aboard these destroyers. The destroyers were to fire from 10,000 yards offshore, using a photomosaic for targets, then close to 3,000 yards for close support and on-call fires.

#### PRE-ENGAGEMENT OPERATIONS

The Amphibious Force moved from Guadalcanal to positions off Cape Torokina without detection, Japanese reconnaissance planes having been driven off. Meanwhile, a regimental-level diversionary landing had taken place in the Treasury Islands, and a regimental-size deep raid conducted on Choiseul, both 5 days in advance. For one month, air and naval attacks were made against Japanese airbases and naval installations on Bougainville and nearby islands.

The diversionary attacks and deception operations convinced the Japanese that Choiseul would be the main landing area, and they expected secondary landings at Buka Island west of Bougainville and in the Shortland Islands. The Commander in Chief, Japanese Combined Fleet at Truk diverted his forces from the Solomons area toward the Central Pacific, and they arrived too late to influence the operation. One

naval task force was, however, just north of the Solomons and played an important role.

#### THE ENGAGEMENT

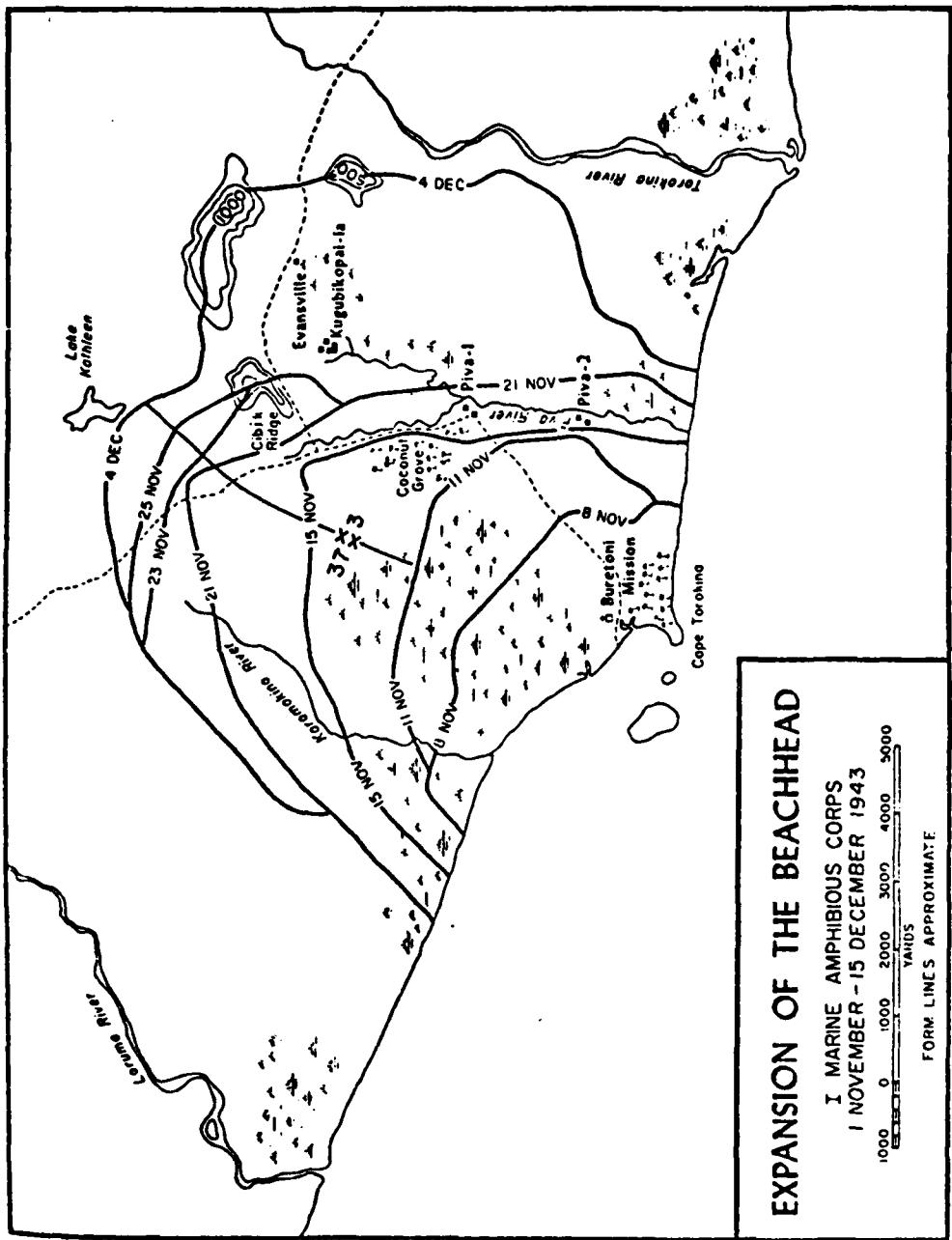
The Amphibious Force lay off the Cape Torokina Beaches at dawn, November 1. A patrol ashore failed to give the "less than 300 Japs" signal, adding uncertainty.

At 0545, minesweeping took place under the protection of destroyer fires. At 0645, eight troop transports were in line 3000 yards offshore.<sup>3</sup> Five-inch naval gunfires poured into Puruata Island (a threat to the beaches, and therefore to be seized by Marine Raider forces). At 0645, the landing force began disembarking, 7500 men in the D-Day force. At 0710 naval gunfire shifted to prearranged beachhead targets, and at 0715 the first boats headed shoreward. At 0725, naval gunfire lifted to targets inland. At this moment 31 torpedo and scout bombers from Munda bombed and strafed the beaches for 5 minutes to a distance of 2,000 yards inland.

The 9th Marines landed unopposed at 0740-0750 over the northern beaches, 3/9 on the right (Map 2). The landing proved extremely hazardous because very high, rolling surf tossed the craft about; many LCVP's and LCM's broached to and collided in the breakers. Thirty-two boats were wrecked in the initial assault wave, 64 by mid-day. The beach had an unexpected 12-foot embankment, preventing effective grounding of the craft. Battalions were completely mixed together, many elements having landed on the wrong beaches. The 9th Marines were unopposed, except for one strafing attack as they landed which caused only light casualties and damage. The next hour involved reorganization, but by 1300, 3/9 had reformed, and advanced to and entrenched at the O-1 line. It established a strong flank outpost just short of the Laruma River (Map 3).

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<sup>3</sup> The 3rd Marine Division records report 1500 yards. The above figure appears in the official history of the operation.



MAP 3

The 3rd Marines beaches were moderately to strongly defended, especially on the right flank where numerous pillboxes and gun emplacements had all survived the air and naval attacks. The Japanese used 90mm and 75mm guns effectively. Only about 230 Japanese soldiers were present, and they lost their pillbox positions by noon and yielded up the entire beachhead by dark. Puruata Island, defended by up to 100 men, took two days to reduce.

In the afternoon, strong Japanese air attacks, though driven off, forced the transports to leave the area. They returned late in the afternoon, and had unloaded most supplies when an impending major naval engagement compelled them to leave. The naval engagement took place in the early hours of November 2, off Cape Torokina. Approximately equal cruiser and destroyer forces met, and in about 1-1/2 hours, U.S. Admiral Merrill bested the Japanese force and drove it from the area for good. The resupply and landing reinforcements were assured. By evening of D-Day, 3/9 had slowly pushed patrols through swamps and jungle for another 300 to 400 yards to the front (Map 3).

#### D+1 and D+2

Lacking knowledge of the nearby terrain, 3/9 continued to send patrols through waist-deep swamp and jungle. Its troops also assisted in organizing and moving supplies. The Division Commander pulled in the beachhead flanks on D+2, to constitute a reserve. This brought 3/9 to a sector just west of the Koromokina River. 2/9 and 1/9 were moved to the right flank of the beachhead, leaving 3/9 (attached on November 6 to 3rd Marines) holding the left flank of the beachhead.

#### D+3 and D+4

3/9 patrolled to the Laruma River without contact. By the end of D+4, the beachhead was 10,000 yards wide and 5,000 yards deep at the center. The artillery, landed D-Day, was finally able to go into position, the beach crowding having delayed it. Some 6200 tons were jammed on the

beaches, which had no road exits. Follow-on supplies had to be dumped on Puruata Island. The engineers began draining the swamps into the sea, and road exits were started on D+5. Total casualties in the entire beach to date, mainly in the right-hand sector of 3rd Marines, were 39 KIA, 104 WIA, and 39 MIA; enemy KIA were 32, the remainder of the 230 being WIA or POW's. Most casualties were on the right flank beaches. From that sector trails led to the main enemy concentrations and objectives (beyond the period of this engagement).

#### D+5 and D+6

3/9 continued patrolling in strength along the coast and deep into the jungle, encountering occasional sniper fire. The 3rd Marines took positions on the MLR immediately to the right of 3/9.

#### D+7 (The Japanese Counter-Landing on the Flank of 3/9)

The Japanese had long planned counter-landings as a means to destroy beachheads, but previous efforts had been cancelled. This time, they planned a two-fold attack to roll up the beachhead -- a counter-landing on the west (left) flank to be followed by guerrilla harassment, and a larger ground attack against the right flank. This was originally to have occurred the day after the landing, but the presence of U.S. naval elements near the landing sites west of the beachhead caused a five-day postponement. On November 7, a force of 21 small boats, escorted to the area by 4 destroyers and destroyer escorts, landed at dawn, gaining complete surprise. The first U.S. forces to see them thought they were American, as the boats resembled U.S. boats in profile.

The Japanese landed without opposition, but then were immediately engaged by 90mm AA and 12th Marine artillery. The Japanese force, a battalion of the 54th Infantry, was 850 strong by Japanese records; but ours showed it to be about 475. This force landed widely dispersed

because of darkness and the heavy surf, between the Koromokima and Laruma Rivers, inside two of the strong outpost patrols of 3/9. The Japanese had believed the U.S. beachhead to be much farther east.

A force of 100 Japanese, landing within a few hundred yards of the MLR, immediately attacked without awaiting reinforcements or planning a coordinated attack.

It fell to 3/9 to blunt this attack. At this time, 3/9 held a sector with its right flank on the Koromokina River, its left on the coast, in the order right to left: Co. I, Co. L, Co. K. A battery of the 12th was positioned behind Co. I; 3/3 was on 3/9's right, then 2/3, with 1/3 in Division reserve in this sector.

At 0820, Lt. Col. Asmuth committed Co. K plus an attached regimental heavy weapons company to attack directly to the front. It hit the Japanese about 150 yards beyond the MLR. This force had already occupied foxholes dug by 1/9 and 2/9 before they left this sector, and it met Co. K with strong light machine gun fire from the trenches and automatic sniper fire from trees. There ensued a five-hour battle, in which Co. K was unable to advance. (The other companies remained in their MLR positions.)

At 1315, the 3rd Marines CO committed 1/3. It passed through Co. K, which by then had casualties of 5 KIA and 13 WIA. 1/3 was also unable to advance until several tanks joined the fight, and even then it gained only 200 yards. At 1700, the U.S. attack was halted. 1/21, newly landed, prepared for attack, scheduled at first for that night, then rescheduled for early D+8.

#### D+8

After a heavy artillery preparation, 1/21 passed through 1/3 and made rapid progress. Meanwhile on D+7, two platoon-size patrols of 3/9 had

been cut off. Both fought running firefights. The first regained the Marine lines 30 hours later, after a circuitous inland route. The other, after running into the Japanese force opposing Co. K and another force to its west, was evacuated by sea into the perimeter. This force killed about 35 Japanese and suffered light casualties.

1/21 advanced on D+8 about 1500 yards, having killed or wounded about 250, most in the artillery preparation. The remainder of the Japanese force was destroyed by air attacks in the next two days. 3/9 was then transferred to the right flank of the beachhead.

Records show that the Japanese did not know the beachhead and thus landed too close to the U.S. forces. Furthermore, communications with the forces on the east flank broke down, and that attack occurred too late to affect the action on the west flank. Japanese maps captured in the western area on D+8 revealed the overall plan and permitted the Division to block the attack from the east.

#### AFTER-ACTION SUMMARY

3/9 reached the objective line in the landing phase (500 yards deep) by 1300, D-Day, established assigned outpost positions without incident at the Laruma River, and consolidated its position on the flank on D+2. In its counter-attack against the Japanese landing, its Co. K was unable to advance significantly against the Japanese hasty but entrenched defense. (The other companies, minus 2 platoon patrols behind Japanese lines, held their positions in the MLR without opposition.) Casualties were light: 5 KIA and 13 WIA in a five-hour battle against almost equal numbers. The surprise of the counter-landing was somewhat mitigated by the size of the force and the piecemeal character of its commitment of forces. 3/9 was in the front lines all eight days, and actively engaging the enemy during two. The main obstacle to the landing phase was the character of tide, surf, and landing beach; and in the counter-landing, determined defense by the Japanese force.

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ENGAGEMENT 24. BATTALION AMPHIBIOUS LANDING OPERATION, 3RD BN, 9TH MARINES,  
3RD MARINE DIVISION, NORTHERN GUAM BEACHES, JULY 21-28, 1944

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INTRODUCTION

This engagement describes the operations of the 3rd Battalion, 9th Marines, in a division-sized amphibious assault landing at Guam, through the establishment and consolidation of the beachhead, the shore-to-shore capture of Cabras Island, and a one-day attack to seize the Mt. Chachao-Mt. Alum area.

The sections of this engagement report and their subject matter are:

• General Preparation for the Engagement

This summarizes the concept for the invasion and the major command structure, and describes the enemy strength and general dispositions on Guam.

• Unit Background

This summarizes the early steps in forming 3/9, its prior training and experience in the United States and the Solomons, and its rehearsal for the Guam campaign.

• Pre-Engagement Operations

This gives further details of the planning, states the missions, summarizes the state of pre-invasion intelligence, and describes the preparatory fires and air strikes before the landing.

• The Engagement

This describes chronologically the operations of 3/9 and, in less detail, related actions of other units, through D+7.

• After-Action Summary

This summarizes the achievement of missions and objectives, obstacles encountered, and casualties suffered and inflicted.

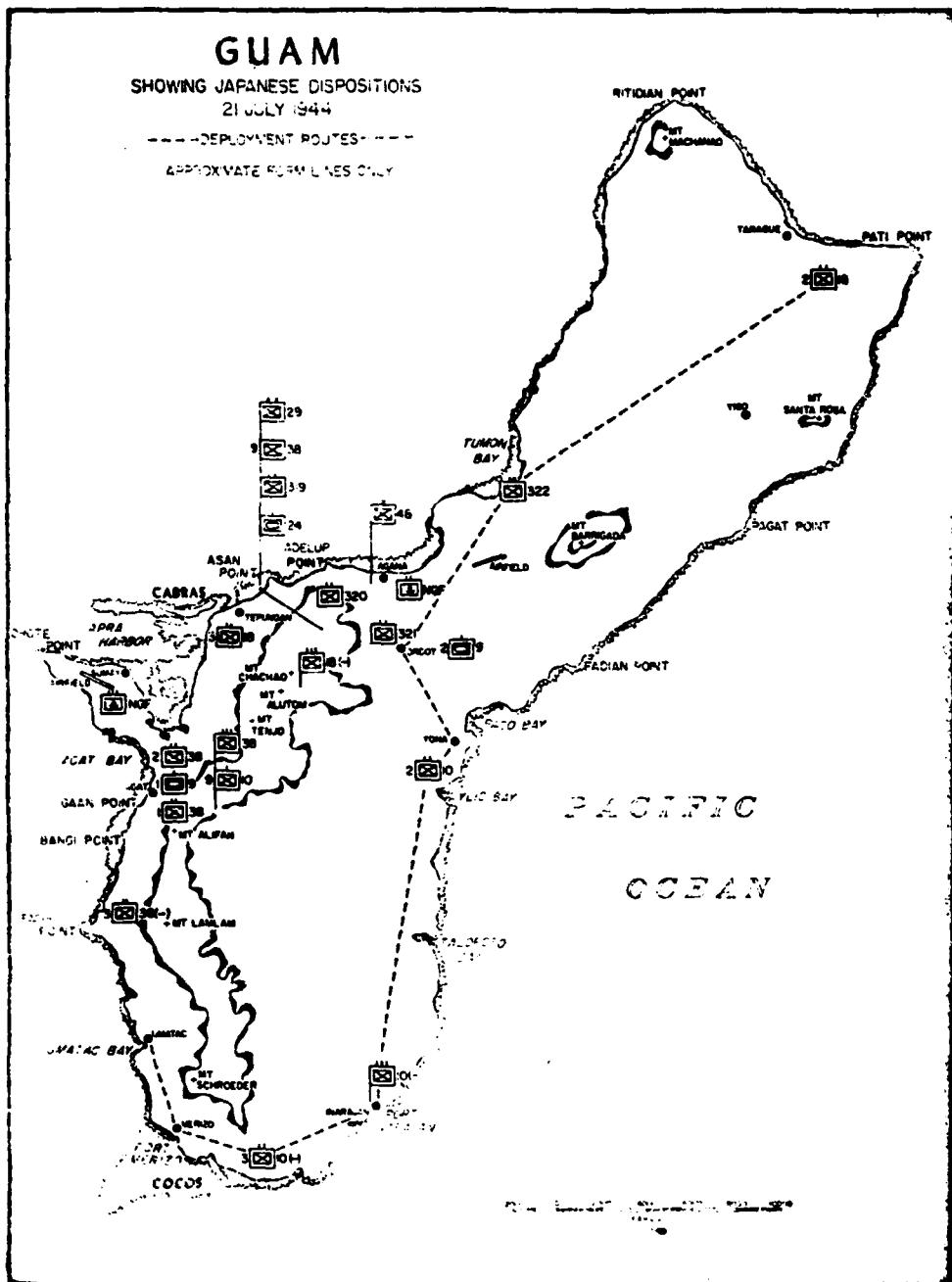
#### GENERAL PREPARATION FOR THE ENGAGEMENT

The invasion of Guam resulted from a high-level decision to move primarily via key Central Pacific Islands in order to control and protect the maritime routes of advance to the Philippines and then Japan. Control of the Marianas, of which Saipan, Tinian, and Guam were the most important, was essential to this strategy. The Guam operation, originally to have been virtually simultaneous with the Saipan landing, was delayed a month to avoid the risks related to the approach of the Japanese fleet and the impending Battle of the Philippine Sea, which took place June 20.

The landing operation and follow-up ground action were planned and conducted jointly by Southern Attack Force (TF53), Vice Admiral Richard L. Conolly commanding, and III Amphibious Corps, Major General Roy S. Geiger commanding. (He also commanded at Bougainville.) This Corps consisted of the 3rd Marine Division, the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade, and Corps Artillery. Major General Allen H. Turnage was in command of the 3rd Marine Division, as he had been at Bougainville.

The general plan was for two separate landings, to the north and south of Orote Peninsula. Once the northern and southern forces linked up, there would be a drive to the northern end, across the high inland ground.

The 3rd Marine Division was to land on the northern of the two beachheads, a narrow beach (a little over 2,000 yards long) between Adelup Point and Asan Point (Map 1). The two landings (the southern by the recently formed 1st Provisional Marine Brigade) would pinch off the Orote Peninsula with its important Apra Harbor and airfield, then the coordinated drive north would take place. 77th Infantry Division was to be held in floating reserve (later it landed over the southern beachhead).



MAP 1

### Enemy Capabilities

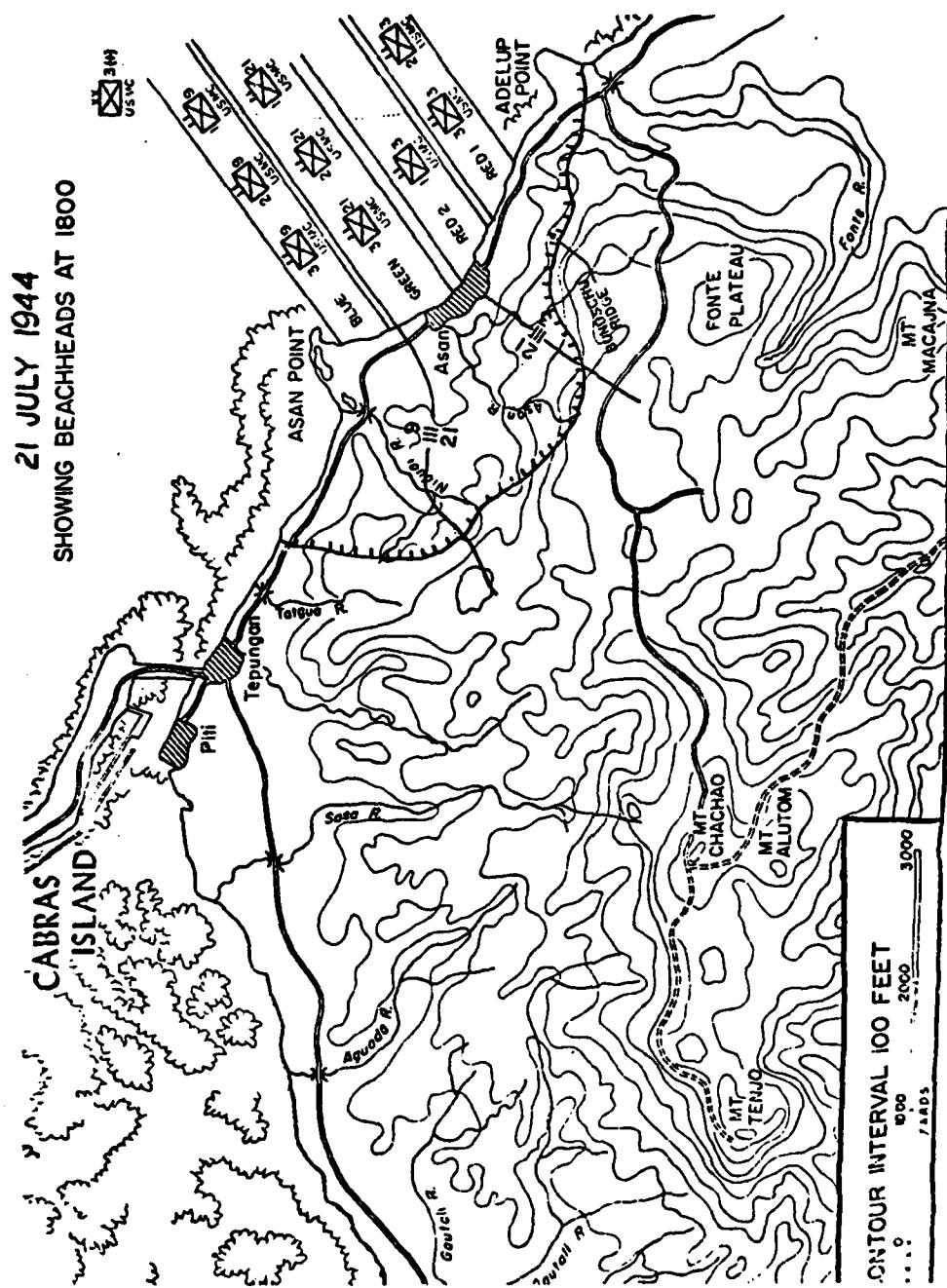
Japan viewed the Marianas as their last defense line, loss of which would inevitably lead to surrender. A buildup began in mid-winter 1943-1944, but the first sizeable forces reached Guam in March.

The 29th Infantry Division from Manchuria was sent to the Marianas. Almost all of the 18th Infantry of this division was lost at sea to a submarine. The regiment was reorganized on Saipan, and, less one battalion, sent to Guam, with two tank companies (2894 men in all). One battalion was deployed opposite Cabras Island (Map 1) with regimental headquarters inland near Mt. Chachao, (Map 2) but the bulk of the forces were south of Orote Peninsula.

The second main force was the 48th Independent Mixed Brigade (3800 men), organized on Guam from elements of two divisions, also with experience in Manchuria. The 10th Independent Mixed Regiment, from the same two divisions, was the third main force (1900 men). The infantry battalions of these commanders consisted of three rifle companies, a machine gun company, and a gun company (47mm AT and 70mm howitzers). The 38th Infantry organization was virtually the same. 48th IMB was headquartered just northeast of Adelup Point. Its 320th battalion defended the northern beaches, while the other three battalions were held inland to the northeast in the Agana-Tumon Bay area. Another two battalions were further north, and engaged in the battle only in a D+4/5 counterattack.

The bulk of the artillery was deployed in the Agana Bay area. A tank battalion was concealed near the base of Orote Peninsula for use in counterattack, but one tank company was in direct support of the northern beach forces. Finally, the 10th IMR was moved to the ridge area above the northern beaches before the landing started, and the 2nd Bn, 19th Infantry backed up the 370th, opposite the northern beaches. Thus, the immediate northern beach area was defended essentially by one battalion with highly organized defenses, backed up by about a regiment and a half.

**21 JULY 1944**  
**SHOWING BEACHHEADS AT 1800**



MAP 2

The main forces were held near Agana until the thrust of the landings and their progress could be determined.

The defenses on Cabras Island were unknown to U.S. forces. They would have to be reduced to secure the right flank of the 3rd Marine Division, and to block any forces which might cross from Orote Peninsula. Army forces defending Guam were about 11,500. The total Japanese force defending Guam was more than 18,000. But the only other forces of immediate relevance to the northern beaches were about 1800 naval construction personnel who had been hastily reorganized as infantry.

The Japanese had to build their fortifications hastily from late March on. With the aid of about 2,300 coast defense personnel, they were able to improve them significantly, including entrenchments, pillboxes, and machine gun emplacements. Their weapons, however, were primarily 75mm or smaller. They relied heavily on cave defenses.

#### UNIT BACKGROUND

3rd Marine Division was located at Tetere, Guadalcanal, when it drew the Guam assignment. It was fresh from its first campaign in Bougainville, in which 3/9 with its regiments had served from the D-Day landing November 1, 1943, through January 9, 1944.

The 9th Marines were reactivated at Camp Elliott, California, February 12, 1942, drawing its initial personnel (for 3/9, the first unit formed) from the Second Marines. 3/9 began its wartime training April 1 under the regimental commander, Colonel Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr. The regiment was severely depleted that summer, furnishing cadres to other Marine regiments.

In August, it moved with one battalion of the 12th Marines (Artillery) to Camp Pendleton. There it was brought to full strength and organized into three battalion landing teams with full attachments. On Christmas eve it became a part of the 3rd Marine Division. The regimental strength was about 3,000, plus another 2,500 attached.

After extensive small-unit training, the regiment sailed for New Zealand, arriving February 3, 1943. 3/9 was then commanded by Lt. Colonel Robert Thaxton, an experienced officer. Upon Thaxton's promotion, Lieut. Colonel Walter Asmuth, Jr., who commanded during the Torokina engagement as well as at Guam, assumed command. Thus, the battalion had about 17 months in the theater before Guam, and its commanding officer about 14 months. The regimental commander was Colonel Edward A. Craig, who also commanded both in Bougainville and Guam. As a result of the Bougainville operation, 3/9 was thoroughly trained in jungle warfare. It had no previous over-the-reef landing experience.

For the Guam operation, intensive training in landing over reefs was conducted, including the loading and reef-transfer of heavy weapons and supplies. There was also special training in tank-infantry operations. Late in May, the landing operation and follow-up phases were rehearsed at Guadalcanal and Tulagi.

The Division then staged at Eniwetok, and when the Guam landing date was changed from June 18 to July 21 it returned to Eniwetok. The troops had been aboard ship a month. They now engaged in small unit tactical training ashore, but essentially lived aboard ship and rotated ashore. Thus, while well trained, they were cooped up for long periods, which significantly reduced their strength and stamina.

In sum, 3/9 had had significant battle experience at Bougainville, and it had extensive training for this operation, facilitated by its postponement, but its training and condition were hampered by long shipboard confinement.

#### PRE-ENGAGEMENT SITUATION AND OPERATIONS

##### Planning Situation

The Corps operations plan was issued May 17. The plan was for the 3d Marine Division to land on the northern beaches three regiments abreast,

with battalions in columns, in order from left to right, the 3rd, 21st, and 9th (Map 2). 3/9 would land first, as it had to seize and destroy pillboxes on Asan Point flanking the eastern beach. 2/9, then 1/9 were to land behind 3/9, then pass through 3/9 in order to seize the low terrain and coastal area near the base of the Orote Peninsula.

#### Missions

The initial mission of the 9th Marines reinforced (9th Combat Team), as stated in the Division Operations Plan, was: "Beginning at H+1, W-Day, land on BEACH BLUE....Overrun and destroy all hostile resistance; seize objective D-1 within Zone of Action (Map 2), be prepared for advance and seizure of further objectives on Division Order. Maintain contact with 21st CT on left. Protect right (west) flank of division. 1st Bn, 12th Marines to land with the 9th RCT in direct support."

The initial mission of 3/9, assigned by the regimental commander, was to land in the second, third, and fourth waves (behind the amphibious tractors), first protect them against immediate counterattack, then pivot right to seize or destroy the gun positions and pillboxes at Asan Point, revert to regimental reserve when 1/9 and 2/9 passed through, then to follow behind 2/9, prepared on order to embark in LVT's and capture Cabras Island by a shore-to-shore operation.

Planning the scheme of maneuver for the landing, for securing initial objectives, and for coordination of the advance of the regiments and battalions was thorough, and plans were carefully rehearsed. Fire support was also carefully planned, taking account of the recent Saipan experience. At the northern beaches, the reef was dry at low tide. Therefore, trucks would move supplies in from the reefs; 105mm artillery would be carried ashore in 60 amphibian trucks.

### Quality of Information

Intelligence about the enemy and terrain was of a high order, including size of defending forces, appropriate deployments, and the like. But explicit knowledge on locations of pillboxes, cave-protected artillery, and other enemy tactical locations and strengths of direct interest to infantry battalions was very fragmentary. The battalion depended heavily for this intelligence on patrolling and other combat operations ashore. On the right flank, in 9th Marines' sector, physical features were much better understood than on the left, where the rugged, irregular character of the terrain proved more difficult than expected, making the going for 3rd and 21st Marines very tough for the first 4 days. Maps of the island were reasonably informative, though precise locations of the many installations which the Japanese had built at feverish pace after the invasion of Saipan were not available. Aerial photographs, however, filled in some of the information missing from maps.

### Softening Up Operations

In June, air attacks hit the airfields heavily and cut up the runways. Invasion was preceded by a 13-day naval and air bombardment, reportedly the heaviest of the war.<sup>1</sup> On July 4, U.S. destroyers attacked Agana Bay, Asan Point, and Agat Bay. Reportedly 50 percent of all installations were destroyed in the beach area, and many cave entrances closed. By the landing date, Admiral Conolly's staff considered every fixed gun on the west coast of Guam out of commission. Moreover, supply dumps, troop concentrations, bridges, artillery positions, and boats were systematically attacked by two carrier divisions.

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<sup>1</sup> Naval rounds fired were: 16" - 836, 14" - 5422, 8" - 3862, 5" - 16,000.

## ENGAGEMENT

### D-Day

The Division force, carried in LST's, was landed with 3rd Marines on the left, 21st Marines in the center, 9th Marines on the right, over a beach about 2000 yards wide (Map 2). At 0545, four battleships began firing (twelve 14-inch guns), hitting defenses about 1500 yards inland, while the cruisers and destroyers fired at the beaches and to their flanks. From 0715 until 0815, about 200 carrier planes swept the beaches in enfilade from Agana to Bangi Point. Between 0530 and 1000 gunboats fired some 9,000 4.5-inch rockets, the heaviest such fires of the war.

The assault was led by a wave of nine gunboats with rocket launchers, followed by amphibious tractors with 37mm guns, and these in turn by about 180 LVT's carrying the assault troops. LCVP's carried the reserve troops to the reef line, where they transferred to returning tractors. Twenty tanks were landed on the beaches of 9th and 21st Marines at the same time as infantry reserve units, from LCT's and LCM's. Immediately behind them the direct support artillery were landed (105mm direct ship-to-shore, the 75mm pack howitzers by reloading at the reef).

The Japanese did not fire until the landing troops had passed the reef, apparently because their few larger caliber guns had been silenced. Once past the reef, heavy fires met the landing Marines, and casualties were moderate to heavy.

The sector of the 9th Marines included Asan Point, and its direction of inland thrust was up the Nidai River Valley, thence to the high ground beyond, and ultimately to the Sasa and Aguada River lines (Map 2). This was essentially flat land and lightly defended. 3/9 began landing in the second and third waves, without receiving enemy fire, at 0830. However, the next two waves received moderate to heavy artillery and infantry fires, in the water, on the reef, and on the beach. The Japanese had perfect observation of the beach on D-Day, and for many days after.

3/9 immediately swung right to seize the gun positions at Asan Point. At first moving rapidly, Co. I, 3/9 soon was met by heavy fires from the caves on Asan Point and the ridge running from there to the mouth of the Nidai River. The reserve company, L, was then committed to help clear the ridge, while Co. K on the left moved quickly through rice paddies and very soon seized the ridge in its sector. At mid-morning, supporting artillery moved into position. At 1350, several hours behind the planned schedule, 3/9 gained its objectives at Asan Point and the Asan Ridge. At 1415, 1/9 and 2/9 passed through 3/9, and reached their objective position on the ridge, within 400 yards of the Tatgua River at 1600, against light to moderate opposition. By 1830, 9th Marines held a beachhead sector 1500 yards deep, and had established firm contact with the 21st Marines. During the Asan Point operation, Lt. Col. Asmuth, CO, 3/9 was wounded, and was replaced by Major Donald B. Hubbard, while the Commanders of Cos. I and K were killed in action. 9th Marines had suffered 20 officer and 190 enlisted casualties. The heaviest were in 3/9: 22 KIA, 100 WIA, 1 MIA. Most had fallen to mortar, artillery, and sniper fire.

Supplies had been landed essentially according to plan, without significant interruption. The entire beachhead was established, though tenuously in 3rd Marines sector, and Major General Turnage had assumed command ashore. A company of the Japanese 320th battalion had been destroyed; and the other forces, elements of 3/18, were withdrawn at night to the high ground east of the 9th, thus leaving the coastal area to the south largely undefended.

D+1

The attack in 9th Marines' sector jumped off at 0700, still with 2/9 on the right of 1/9. The objectives were: seize the D-2 and D-3 lines (high ground short of the Tatgua and Sasa Rivers) and (3/9 only) seize Cabras Island. By 1000, the D-2 line was captured against 10- to 20-man Japanese elements of 3/18. At 1300, the attack was renewed and by 1700 2/9 had captured the coastal villages of Tepungan and Piti.

Meanwhile, 3/9 prepared to seize Cabras Island (Maps 1 and 2). The shore-to-shore operation was to be made in 18 amphibious tractors. Supporting 3/9 were the regimental heavy weapons company and a company of Sherman tanks. From an assembly area near the mouth of the Tatgua River, 3/9 attacked at 1400, D+1. Armored amphibians preceded the assault platoons. These, carried over a reef and onto the beaches in LVT's, landed at 1425. The island was not defended, but it was heavily mined and contained thick jungle. At 1650, 3/9 halted for the night 400 yards beyond the shore.

D+2

Early in the day, 3/9 completed its Cabras objective, occupation of the island, and at 0900 was relieved by the 14th Defense Battalion (Map 3). Meanwhile, as the 3rd and 21st Marines had undergone severe fighting and the 3rd had not yet reached its O-1 objective, 2/9 was detached and moved to the 21st Marines sector, to assist later in a major attack to gain Fonte Plateau. 3/9 therefore replaced 2/9 at 1230, holding a line about 3500 yards inland, west of the Sasa River. As the Japanese had suffered heavy casualties in major counterattacks, both in the north and against 1st Provisional Marine Brigade in the south, all sectors were quiet this day.

D+3

3/9 sent a 30-man patrol down the Piti-Sumay Road, its flank protected in Apra Harbor by six amphibious tractors, to make contact with southern landing force units. It advanced 2600 yards, when it was blocked from further advance by fires from the hills. It discovered huge dumps and evidence that most of the Japanese 78th Infantry had recently withdrawn. This night, five spotters of 3/9 cooperated with the destroyer FRANK and the 90mm's of 14th Defense Battalion on Cabras Island, to intercept enemy barges operating near Sumay.

### 3d MARINE DIVISION PROGRESS

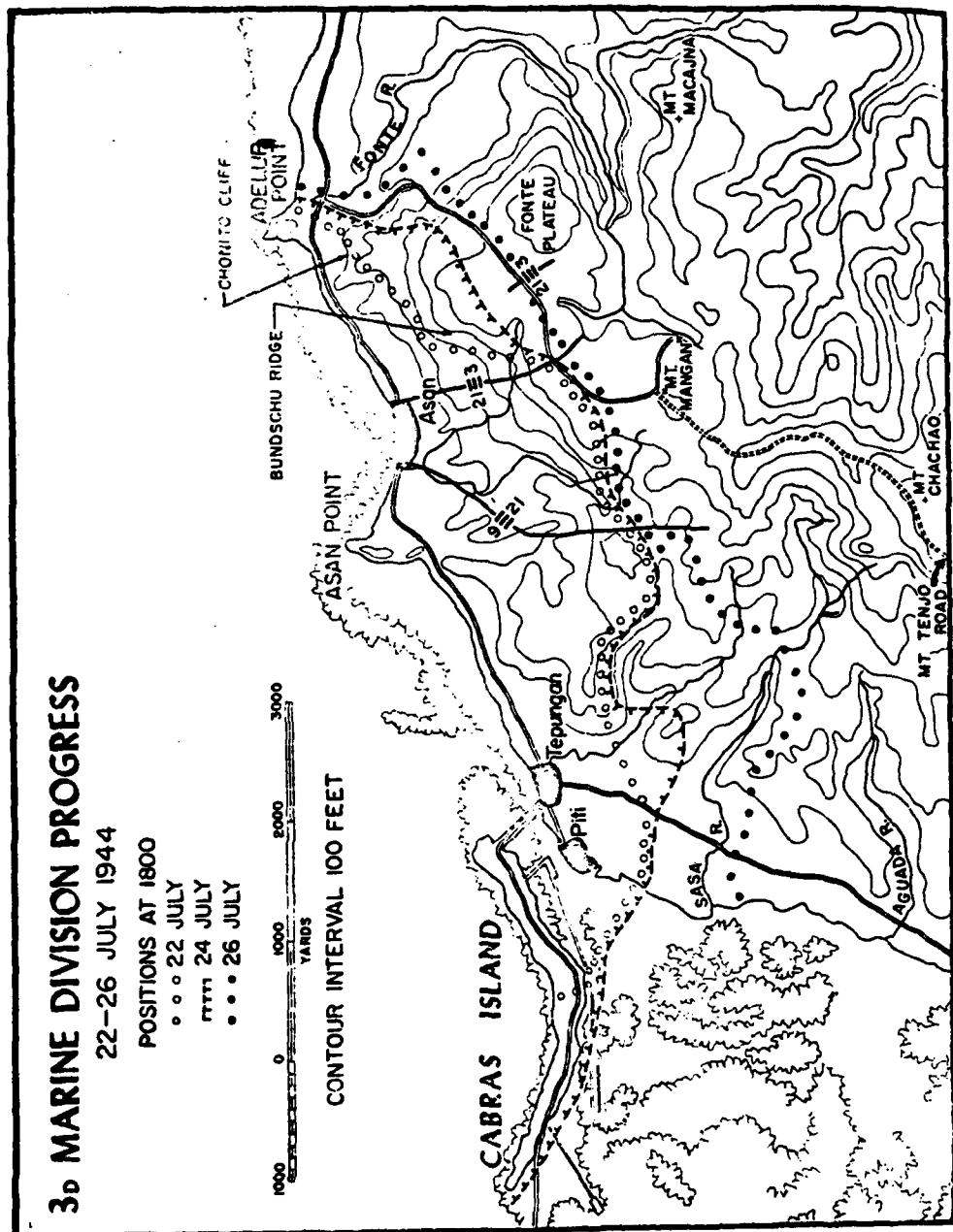
22-26 JULY 1944

POSITIONS AT 1800

- ○ ○ 22 JULY
- ||||| 24 JULY
- ● ● 26 JULY

1000 0 1000 2000 3000  
METERS

CONTOUR INTERVAL 100 FEET



MAP 3

D+4

The 9th Marines continued to hold their line with two battalions. This line was greatly extended, for Corps plans called for concentrating forces in the north. The major Japanese counterattack of the campaign occurred there this night. At this time III Amphibian Corps also had planned a major attack by the southern landing force against strong positions at the neck of the Orote Peninsula. This day, a patrol of 3/9 contacted patrols of 2/22 of the southern landing force, near Atantano.

D+5 to D+7

The southern forces, in a 3-day battle (D+5 to D+7), broke out of Orote Peninsula. 9th Marines were then redeployed facing north and given the D+7 objective of an assault on Mts. Chachao and Alutom, to be carried out in coordination with attacks by the other two regiments between Mt. Chachao and the Fonte Plateau.

On D+7, 3/9 relieved 3/21 in position at 0800 (Map 3). It jumped off at 0910, with 3/21 attached guarding 3/9's open left flank. 3/9 gained its initial objective in 30 minutes, abreast of 1/9. At 1040, 3/9 and 1/9 renewed the attack to seize the Mt. Chachao-Mt. Alutom positions. A company of Japanese atop Mt. Chachao defended strongly. Preceded by an artillery preparation, Cos. I and K rushed the Japanese, gaining the peak by charging the remaining enemy with bayonets and grenades. In 3/9's sector, 135 Japanese dead were counted. This action secured for the 9th Marines its last objective of the engagement. It now held all the area from Mts. Chachao and Alutom to Apra Harbor. 3/9 had advanced 3,000 yards this day, establishing contact on its right with units of the 77th Army Infantry Division at Mt. Tenjo. The day's action was paralleled by major attacks and advances on the left by the 21st and 3rd Marines.

## AFTER-ACTION SUMMARY

- On D-Day, 3/9 achieved its objective, capture of Asan Point at 1350, about 3 hours behind schedule, against strong defenses, after suffering heavy casualties.
- On D+1, 3/9 established a beachhead and reached its objective line 400 yards inland on schedule, in an unopposed landing.
- On D+2, 3/9 completed occupation of Cabras Island in one hour, then assumed a defensive position on the perimeter of the Guam beachhead.
- On D+3 and 4, there was no new offensive mission assigned.
- On D+7, 3/9 attacked up the slopes of Mt. Chachao, gained its initial objective in 30 minutes, then captured its peak against a severe defense in hand-to-hand fighting.

D-Day casualties were heavy, D+7 casualties moderate, others light. Enemy casualties and defenses on D-Day (Asan Point) and D+7 (Mt. Chachao) were heavy. All division units regularly encountered problems in linking up with adjacent units, except that the 9th successfully linked up with the 21st on D-Day afternoon. In the case of the 9th Marines, this was mainly because the sector expanded rapidly in the face of relatively moderate opposition, and the 9th Marines held a long line thinly for several days.

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**ENGAGEMENT 25. 3RD BN, 9TH MARINES, 3RD MARINE DIVISION, BATTLE OF THE MOTAYOMA UPLANDS, IWO JIMA, FEBRUARY 25-MARCH 8, 1945**

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**INTRODUCTION**

This engagement involves the 3rd Battalion, 9th Marines, 3rd Marine Division. 3/9 fought in a Corps-sized land campaign as part of its division, operating for the most part attached to the 21st Marines on the division left flank. The battle was characterized by heavy supporting fires and defending fires over both level and very hilly terrain.

The sections of this engagement report and their subject matter are:

● **General Preparation for the Engagement**

This describes the strategic significance of Iwo Jima, the overall command and major forces employed, the character of the terrain and enemy, both as reported before the engagement and actual, and the general concept and plan for the campaign.

● **Unit Background**

This summarizes the organization of the battalion, its training for and experience in the Bougainville and Guam campaigns, and its training for Iwo Jima.

● **Pre-Engagement Situation and Operations**

This summarizes the division missions, preparation fires for the amphibious assault, and the operations ashore before the commitment of 9th Marines and the 3rd Marine Division on D+6.

● **The Engagement**

This describes chronologically the objectives and combat actions of 3/9 within the context of other division operations for the period D+6 through D+17.

● **After-Action Summary**

This summarizes objectives, achievements, casualties, and major obstacles during the engagement.

GENERAL PREPARATION FOR THE ENGAGEMENT, STRATEGY, OVERALL COMMAND, AND  
FORCES ASSIGNED

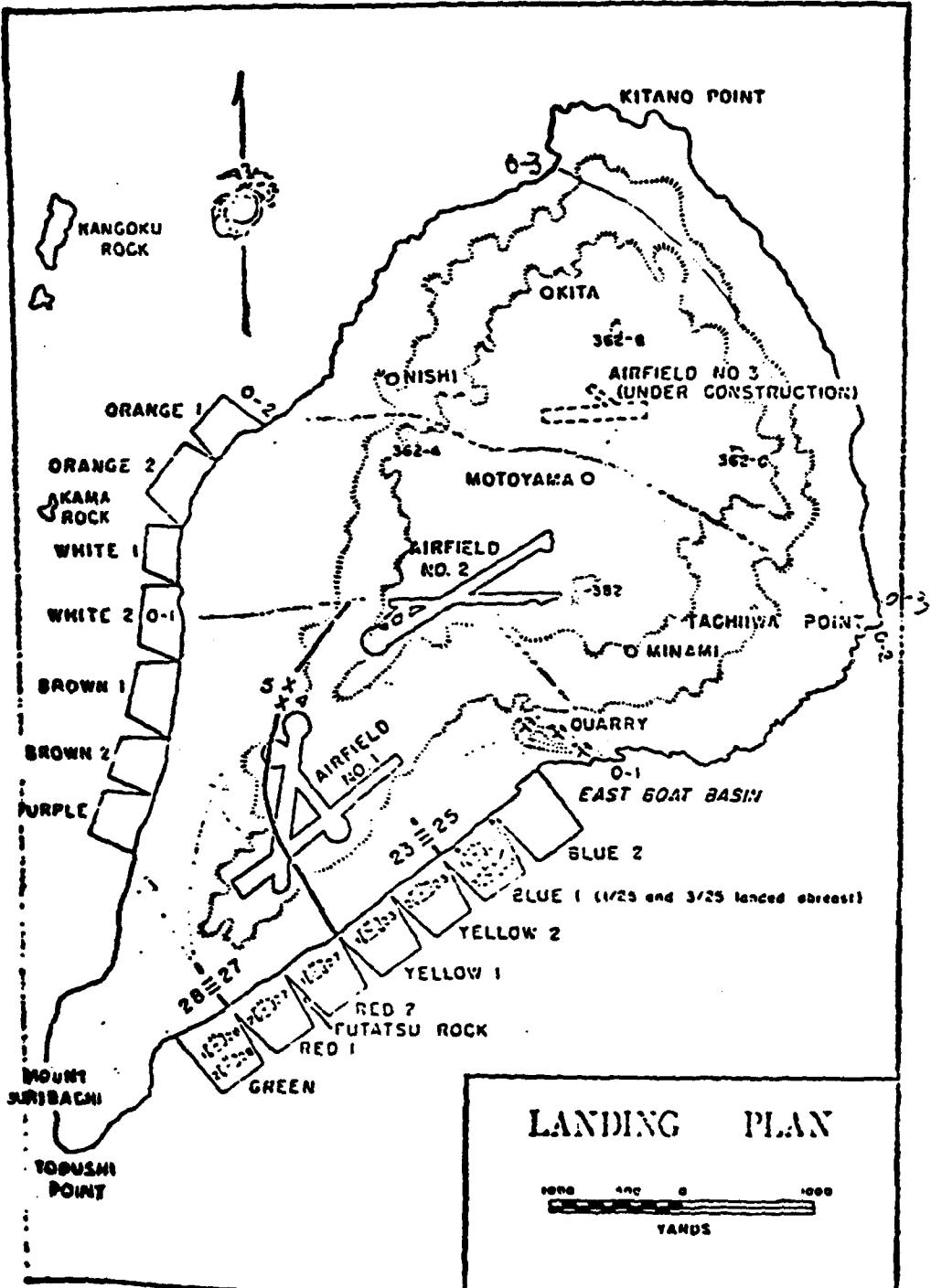
With the establishment of B-29 bases in the Marianas, it became of major importance to establish fighter bases in the Bonins -- halfway from Guam to Tokyo -- to protect the B-29 raids on Japan. Airfields there would also serve as emergency landing fields for crippled B-29's. In September 1944 plans to invade the large island of Formosa were abandoned in favor of Iwo Jima and Okinawa, deemed more within the means of the forces available. Early in October 1944 the order to plan to seize Iwo Jima was issued. The Joint Expeditionary Force, Task Force 51, would be commanded by Vice Admiral Richard K. Turner, and General Holland Smith would be Commanding General, Expeditionary Troops, Task Force 56.

The major forces would be 4th and 5th Marine Divisions for the amphibious assault and, as Task Force floating reserve, the 3rd Marine Division, Major General Graves B. Erskine commanding. The CG, V Amphibious Corps, which would direct the land campaign, was Major General Harry Schmidt. The Corps Headquarters and the 3rd Division were located at Guam, the other two divisions in Hawaii. 3rd Marine Division was still mopping up in Guam when, in a "last-minute" change, it was ordered to move to Iwo Jima waters for D-Day rather than constitute a Guam-based reserve. This was a fortuitous decision, as the Iwo Jima defenses proved much larger and tougher than expected.

TERRAIN AND THE ENEMY

The island of Iwo Jima was 4-1/2 miles long, and at its widest about 1-1/2 miles (see Map 1). Terrain consisted (from the beach area north) of a rugged, heavily fissured, craggy upland, sloping toward the east.

The enemy, estimated at 14,000 strong but actually several thousand larger, had recently been reorganized into a division. It was under command of one of Japan's best senior generals. The ground was thoroughly



MAP 1

organized. Defenses in depth took full advantage of the broken-up terrain. Crevices, fissures, and hills contained concealed tanks, guns, and ground-level pillboxes. Artillery and mortars were registered on all critical points. This, together with excellent observation from the central upland and the 600' Mount Suribachi to the south, insured exceptional precision of fires on both the front lines and the beaches. Beach defenses were organized in depth, covering open areas with extensive antitank and machine gun defenses. The depth of the defenses, extending throughout the island, showed that, should counterattacks at the beachhead fail, the enemy plan was to hold every bit of ground as long as possible. Moreover, Japanese artillery was of heavier caliber than the U.S., while U.S. artillery was to prove largely ineffective against Japanese pillboxes.

To the north was a central, somewhat rugged upland, while near both coasts the terrain was extremely rugged, cut up, and admirably suited to strong interlaced defenses, with superb observation.

The island commander reported directly to the Japanese Imperial Headquarters and received high priority in materiel for the defense of this first part of the homeland to be invaded.

Intelligence for this operation was exceptionally good. Captured documents gave a fairly accurate picture of terrain and dispositions. Army and Navy aerial photos were consolidated by photo interpretation teams of each service into a very accurate Joint Enemy Installation Map, supplemented by submarine observations. However, locations of targets were often not precise enough for best artillery accuracy, and the camouflage and concealment of Japanese emplacements made intelligence imperfect.

There were two operative airfields on the island and a third was under construction. The operative bases were used in intercepting U.S. strategic bombers enroute to Japan.

### The General Concept and Plan

The plan was to assault a beachhead from just north of Mt. Suribachi to East Boat Basin with two divisions (Map 1). The 5th Marine Division, landing on the left, would cut the waist of the island and seize Mt. Suribachi, while the 4th Marine Division would pivot north to seize Airfield No. 1. The 3rd Marine Division, loaded for piecemeal commitment, would remain in floating reserve until needed.

### UNIT BACKGROUND

When alerted for the Iwo Jima operation, 3/9 was engaged in mopping up operations on Guam. 3/9 was organized in California in February 1942. It was brought to full strength and trained at Camp Pendleton from August 1942 through January 1943. Now a part of 3rd Marine Division, it arrived in New Zealand early in February. There it trained under Lt. Colonel Walter Asmuth (who remained its commander through D-Day at Guam, July 21, 1944) for the Cape Torokina, Bougainville amphibious assault landing and campaign. 3/9 saw action for the entire Bougainville campaign (November 1 through January 9, 1944). It emerged a jungle-wise unit.

For the Guam campaign, 3/9 underwent intensive training in over-the-reef landings and in tank-infantry operations. 3/9 landed on Guam D-Day, captured pillboxes on the beach right flank, carried out an unopposed shore-to-shore landing at Cabras Island, then participated in the main effort to capture key mountain peaks and drive to the north of Guam. After mopping up operations, 3/9 and the other division units trained in the pass-through operations it would execute on Iwo Jima.

Heavily depleted at Guam, 3/9 received replacements from the United States in November 1944 and put them through basic small unit training. Supporting tank elements familiarized themselves with the newly received Sherman tanks. On Guam, 3/9 had been commanded by Major Donald B. Hubbard from D-Day morning on, the battalion commander having been wounded. At

the end of the Guam campaign, Lieutenant Colonel Harold C. Boehm, was promoted and assumed command the same day. 3rd Marine Division sailed February 17, 1945, and joined the Expeditionary Force as it arrived from Hawaii.

#### PRE-ENGAGEMENT SITUATION AND OPERATIONS

##### Japanese on Alert

The Japanese detected the movement of the Expeditionary Force as it moved past Saipan, and all units on Iwo Jima went on the alert. Only the timing of the assault would be news, as the softening up bombing and naval gunfire had convinced them to expect an assault.

##### 3rd Marine Division Missions

The division mission, assigned before the landing, was to be prepared for commitment of the 9th and 21st Marines, either piecemeal or as a division (-), on Corps order. (3rd Marines would be kept afloat.) On commitment, units would pass through either 4th or 5th Marine Division, for operations to seize the O-2 line in the north of the island.

3/9 missions, after landing, were assigned from day to day, and these are therefore stated in the engagement section as each new mission was assigned.

##### Preparation Fires for the Amphibious Assault

The island was softened by steady bombing for 72 days, as well as naval gunfire for 3 to 4 days. For 85 minutes before the troops left the line of departure, the fleet, which included 3 carriers (1 CV, 2 CVE's, and a total of 800 ships), bombarded the defenses, then aircraft strafed the flanks of the beaches just before landing craft started shoreward. Yet,

so well concealed were the Japanese and their emplacements that they suffered only light casualties, and most of the weapon installations and prepared infantry positions survived.

Combat Action Before Commitment of 9th Marines and 3/9 (D-Day Through D+5)

Both 4th and 5th Marine Divisions encountered severe enemy fires at the beaches. Moving through volcanic ash, which made the use of wheeled vehicles virtually impossible, both divisions fell well behind schedule against determined resistance.

The 5th Marine Division, after cutting off the waist of the island against moderate resistance, fought against strong defenses and suffered heavy casualties before capturing Mt. Suribachi on D+4.

The 4th Marine Division, attacking north, encountered heavy fires and suffered heavy casualties (28 percent in one battalion) from a carefully integrated defense which contested every foot of the advance. The division was 3 days late gaining the O-1 line (intended for D-Day). By the end of D+4, the 4th Marine Division moved past Airfield No. 1 and was facing Airfield No. 2 (see Map 2). On the right toward the coast, the advance had moved further, but by D+5 faced extremely rugged uphills which would prevent further advance until the center could catch up. This was held by 21st Marines, 3rd Marine Division, which landed and was committed on D+2 (February 21), attached to the 4th Marine Division.

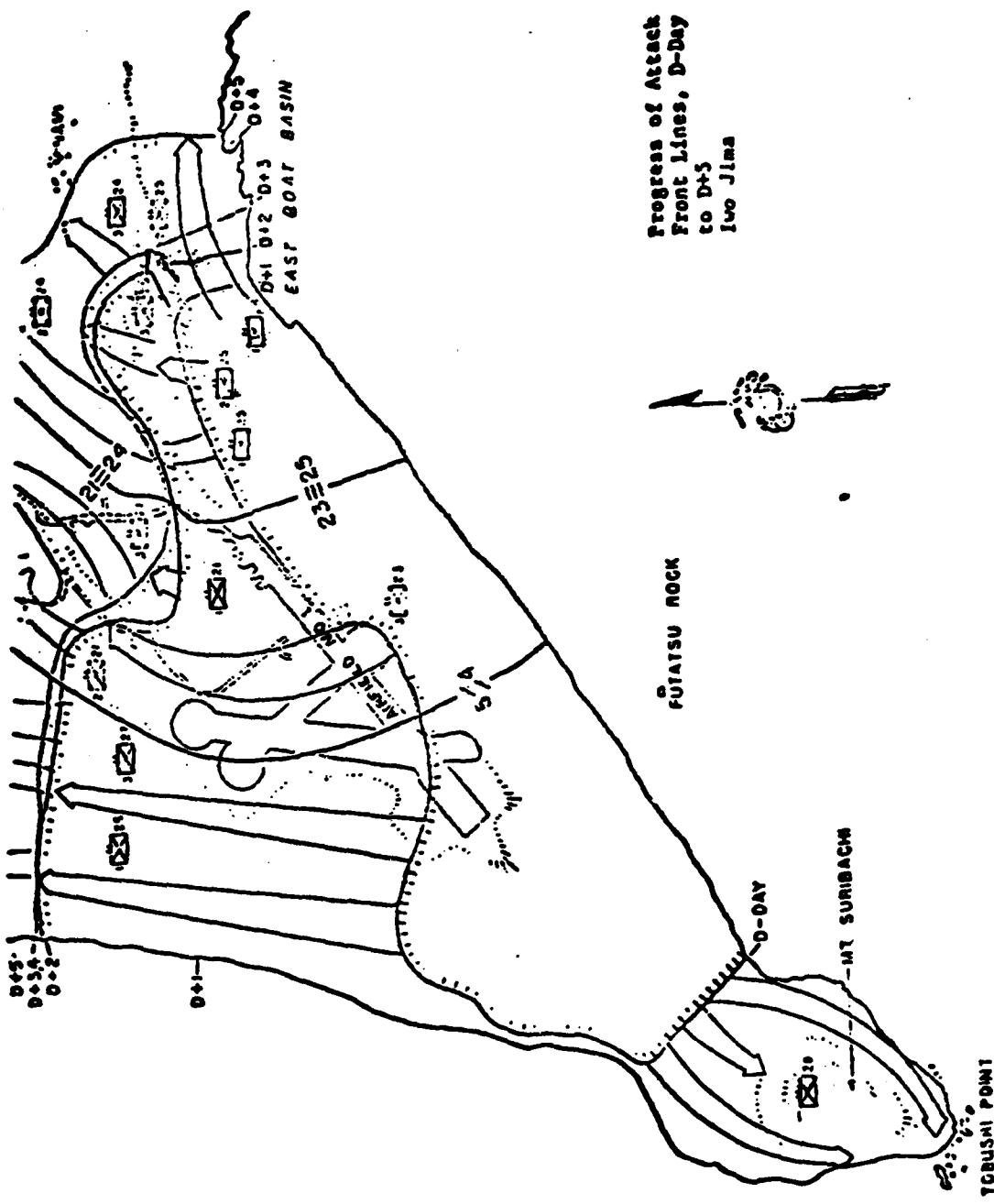
Throughout this advance, the enemy had put up a severe defense and had employed its fires with exceptional thoroughness, volume, and effect. Originally committed Marine forces had suffered moderate to heavy losses.

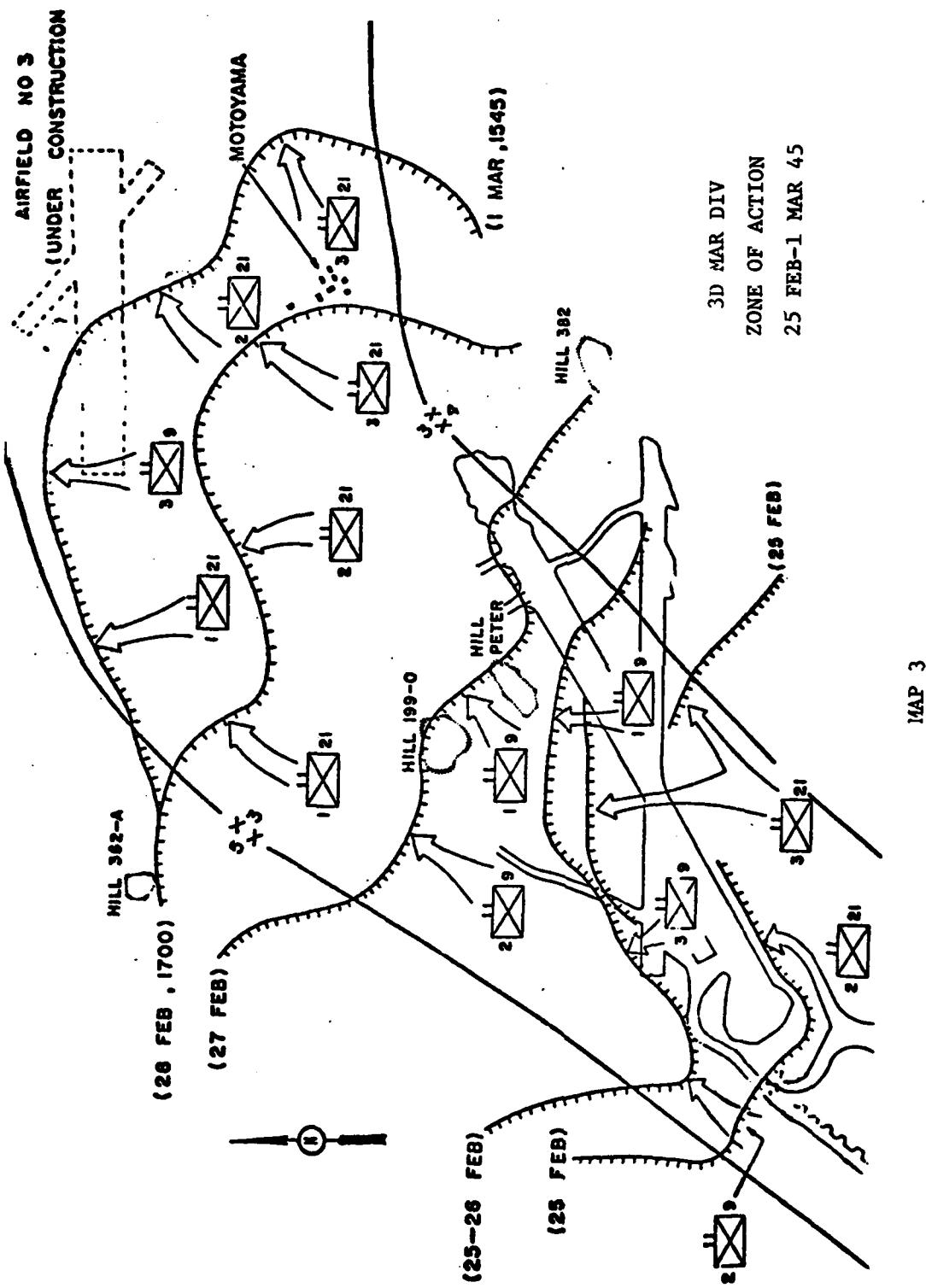
THE ENGAGEMENT

D+6 (February 25)

The 9th Marines landed on D+5, and by evening were in assembly areas behind the 21st Marines (Map 3, bottom of map). The 3rd Marine Division was now

Progress of Attack  
Front Lines, D-Day  
to D+5  
Iwo Jima





assigned the center, between the 4th Marine Division and 5th Marine Division. This sector offered the best terrain for a reasonable pace of advance.

The 3rd Marine Division was now assigned the mission to seize Airfields 2 and 3 (Map 3) and Motoyama Village, as well as HILLS 1990, PETER, 362A (all Maps), and 362B (Map 4). The terrain immediately faced was heavily laced with pillboxes, few of which had been destroyed in the naval and air attacks. Most Division artillery was not yet ashore, but two battalions were available for direct support.

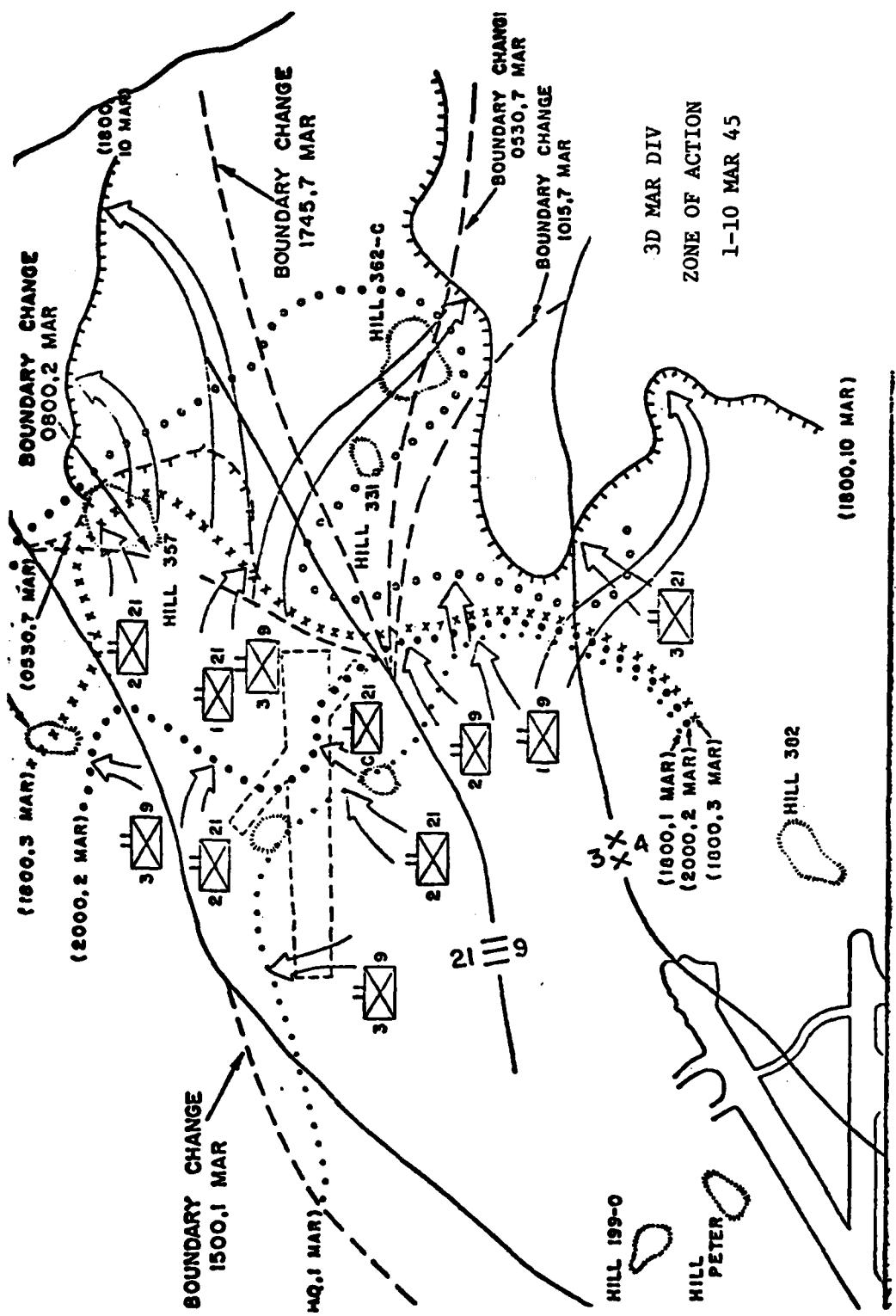
Early on D+6, the 9th Marines passed through the 21st Marines, with 3/9 in reserve. The attack bogged down under heavy fires which knocked out nine tanks in the assault wave.

At 1430, 3/9 passed through the right of 2/9 under heavy fire, with the objective of bypassing the center of resistance and linking up with the 26th Marines (5th Marine Division) on the left.<sup>1</sup>

Immediately, 3/9 came under heavy small-arms fire from the front and left flank, and from a rolling barrage of enemy artillery and mortar fire. Two company commanders were killed within minutes. By 1700 losses were so heavy that units were becoming disorganized, and much of the ground gained was given up. Yet by 1900, 3/9 and 1/9 had moved several hundred yards (to the north of Airfield 2), and 3/9 had established a position far short of contact with the 26th Marines. They were supported late in the day by a newly arrived provisional artillery battalion and the automatic weapons fires of the 21st Marines.

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<sup>1</sup> Battalion missions were habitually assigned as 1-day or part-day objectives. Exact times to achieve them were not normally specified, but a steady advance and objective-achievement were assumed.



D+7

1/9 and 2/9 attacked with heavy losses and slight gains, as 3/9 reverted to regimental reserve.

D+8

Again 1/9 and 2/9 attacked with 3/9 in reserve. This time, in an afternoon second attack, the 9th advanced 700 yards gaining HILLS OBOE and PETER supported by half the Corps artillery and a strong tank force. (See 27 February line on Map 3.) The 5th Marine Division made similar gains, and both were now close to the O-2 line. A new O-3 line was now established, running from 1,000 yards south of Kitano Point (Map 1) to just north of the O-2 line near Tachiiwa Point.

D+9

The 21st Marines relieved the 9th Marines, moved steadily forward.

D+10

To protect the left flank of the rapidly moving 2/21, and to encircle enemy troops facing 2/21, 3/9 was committed (from now on attached to the 21st) during the morning (Map 4). 3/9 advanced against light resistance, and by 1500 had reached the division left boundary; but 1/21 also moved rapidly and reached this boundary to the northwest of 3/9 (Map 3, 1800, 1 March line).

Now, with a division boundary change, the division attack turned east, toward HILLS 357 and 331 (Map 4). The terrain ahead was a high saddle (between HILLS 331 and 362C) intermingled with caves, bunkers, crevices, and boulders, the ground laced with weapons of all calibers, with full observation of the eastern half of the division.

To the west, HILL 362B dominated, giving full observation of this regimental sector. To remedy this, the division boundary was changed to include HILL 362B, and 3/9, attached to the 21st Marines, was assigned to seize this hill the next day.

D+11 (March 2)

The 21st Marines attacked with 3/9 on the left, 1/21 on the right; at the same time the 9th Marines (1/9 and 2/9) attacked on the right. A 15-minute naval gunfire and artillery preparation preceded the attack, and as was now the Division custom, a rolling barrage preceded the advancing infantry. Tanks delivered direct supporting fires. The 9th on the right and 1/21 bogged down. But by 1300, 3/9 had gained a foothold on the slope in front of Hill 362B against strong resistance. Without flank protection the battalion slowly moved up the ridge, halting in mid-afternoon. At 1530, 3/9 jumped off again, supported by the fires of eight artillery battalions, but little progress was made. By night, 3/9 held a 700-yard salient in the enemy lines, on the forward slope of HILL 362B. (The 5th Marine Division was able to take the hill from the flank the next morning.) The enemy kept up fires across the division front through the night.

D+12 (March 3)

At 1000, the 5th Marine Division relieved 3/9 and, together with 1/21, 3/9 moved to reserve positions near Motovoma Village south of Airfield 3 (Map 3). 3/9 remained in reserve until March 6 (D+15) when it took part in the final drive to the sea.

D+15 and D+16

The Division remained stalemated in front of the saddle (HILLS 362C and 331, Map 4). It was decided to commit 3/9 in a night attack to take HILL 362C. As the CO of 3/9 knew nothing of the terrain ahead, CO 1/21 who believed his position to be close to this hill, pointed out the hill and approaches to him in daylight, the hill being 300 yards or so ahead.

The attack jumped off at 0500 in darkness, fog, and silence except for rain. This would be the first U.S. night attack on Iwo Jima. 3/9 made remarkable progress. It advanced 400 yards through heavy fortifications. It caught the enemy asleep and killed many on the slope.

About daybreak, 3/9 discovered that it had taken HILL 331, based on the misinformation from 1/21. HILL 362C lay 250 yards away. 3/9 jumped off again at 0715. Exposed to fire from front, flanks, and rear, 3/9 eliminated cave and bunker defenses one by one and had captured its objective by 1330. 1/9 and 2/9 gained 200 yards that day, in the eastern sector.

#### D+17

In easier fighting, 3/9 and 1/21 reached the beach, and the following day the eastern sector (9th Marines) also reached the sea. This was by no means the end of the campaign. All three divisions were to see another 2 weeks of hard fighting.

#### AFTER-ACTION SUMMARY

##### Objectives Achievement

On D+6. 3/9 was initially stopped; by the end of daylight (1900) it had stabilized its lines but had not reached the assigned objective.

On D+10. 3/9 advanced 1500 yards, and by 1500 achieved its objective, the division left boundary.

On D+11. 3/9 moved beyond the assigned objective, gaining the forward slope of HILL 362B, and creating a 700-yard salient.

On D+16. In a largely unopposed night attack, 3/9 quickly captured HILL 331 (its mistakenly assumed objective), and by 1330 had gained its actual objective, HILL 362C, in the face of determined opposition.

On D+17. 3/9 gained its final objective -- the beach -- against light opposition.

Friendly and estimated enemy casualties suffered in these subengagements were moderate to heavy for 3/9 and heavy for the enemy.

The main obstacle to 3/9, notably on D+6, was the continuous heavy enemy fires from deliberately prepared positions, notably mortar and machine gun fires.

Residual fighting capability of 3/9 was 66%. Its total losses during the 12-1/2 days at the front and 5 days actual fighting were an estimated 610.

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ENGAGEMENT 26. 2ND BATTALION, 25TH MARINES, 4TH MARINE DIVISION: AMPHIBIOUS ASSAULT LANDING, IWO JIMA, FEBRUARY 19, 1945, AND LAND ATTACK THROUGH D+5

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INTRODUCTION

This engagement is one of a series of World War II battles involving Marine infantry battalions. Like most of the others, it involved an amphibious assault followed by several days of combat on land. The unit experienced intense combat, during which the CO, Exec, and S-3 became casualties.

The sections of this engagement report and their subject matter are:

• General Preparation for the Engagement

This describes the strategic significance of Iwo Jima, the overall command and major forces employed, the character of the terrain and enemy, and the general concept and plan for the operation.

• Unit Background

This summarizes the organization and initial training of the battalion and its regiment, its battle experience at Kwajalein, Saipan, and Tinian, its training for Iwo Jima, and its personnel composition.

• Pre-Engagement Situation and Operations

This summarizes the division landing plans, initial division and regimental missions, the regimental landing plan, and the preparatory fires.

• The Engagement

This includes a brief description of the landing operation, combat actions of the 25th Marines before commitment of 2/25, and the engagement through D+5 of 2/25 in the context of operations of adjacent units.

• After-Action Summary

This summarizes the objectives achieved, obstacles encountered, and casualties suffered.

## GENERAL PREPARATION FOR THE ENGAGEMENT

### Strategy, Overall Command, and Forces Assigned

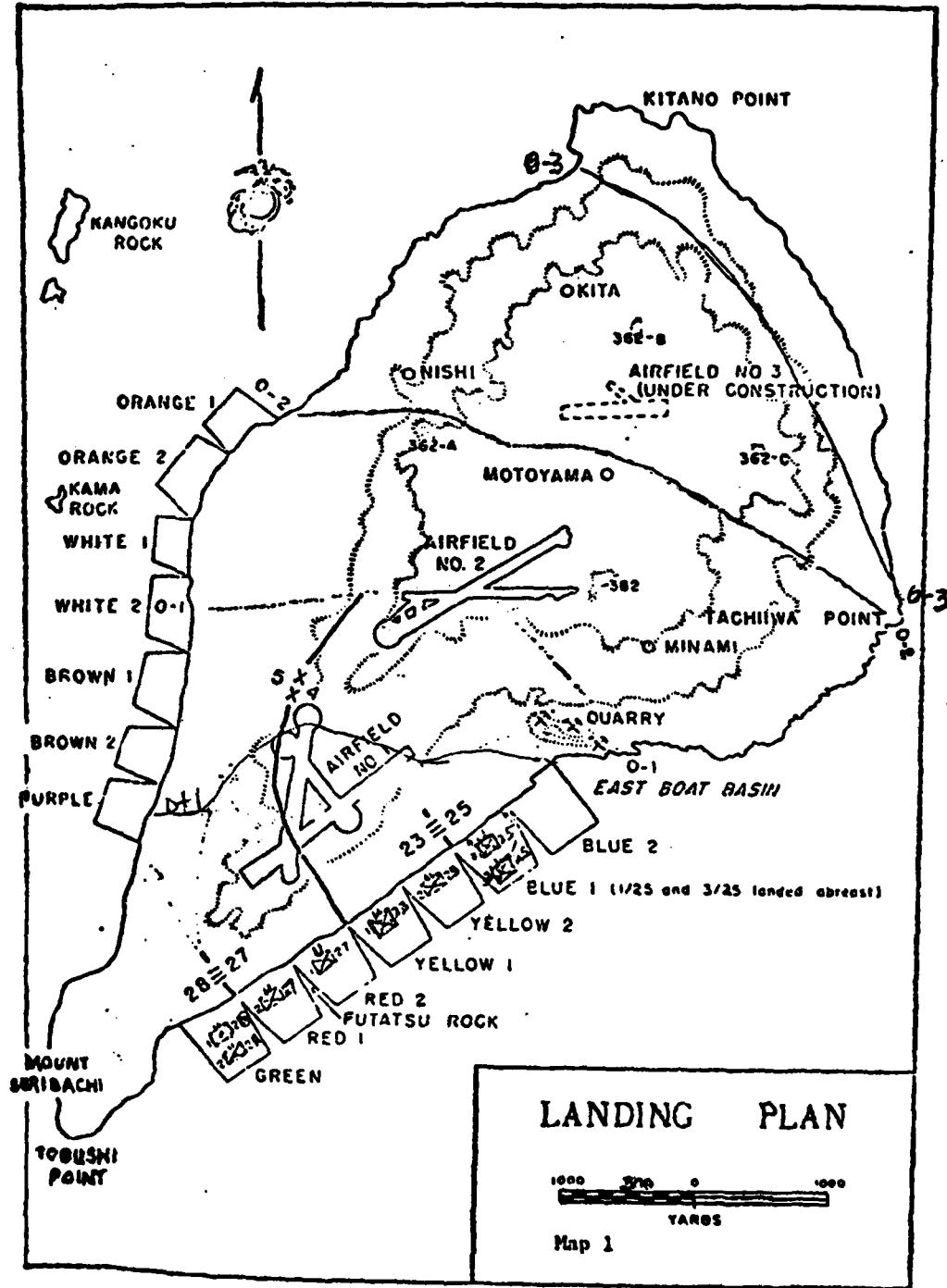
With the establishment of B-29 bases in the Marianas, it became of major strategic importance to establish fighter bases in the Bonins -- half way to Tokyo -- to protect the B-29 raids on Japan. Airfields there would also serve as emergency landing fields for crippled B-29's. In September 1944, plans to invade the large island of Formosa were abandoned in favor of Iwo Jima and Okinawa, deemed more within the capability of the forces available. Early in October 1944, the order to plan to seize Iwo Jima was issued. The Joint Expeditionary Force, Task Force 51, would be commanded by Vice Admiral Richmond K. Turner, and General Holland Smith would be Commanding General, Expeditionary Troops, Task Force 56.

The major forces would be 4th and 5th Marine Divisions for the amphibious assault, and 3rd Marine Division as floating Task Force Reserve. The Commanding General V Amphibious Corps, which would, under overall naval command, direct the land campaign was Major General Harry Schmidt. The Corps Headquarters and the 3rd Marine Division were located at Guam, and the 4th and 5th Marine Divisions in Hawaii. The 4th Marine Division, commanded by Major General Cates, had made amphibious assault landings at Kwajalein Atoll, Saipan, and Tinian.

### Terrain and Enemy

The island of Iwo Jima is 4-1/2 miles long, and at its widest about 1-1/2 miles (Map 1). Terrain consisted (from the beach area north) of a rugged, heavily fissured, craggy upland, sloping toward the east. The beach area was a mixture of soft sand and volcanic ash, and the area facing the beach was covered with volcanic ash about 12" to 18" deep.

The enemy, estimated at 14,000 strong, but actually several thousand larger, had recently been reorganized into a division. It was under



MAP 1

A-47

command of one of Japan's best senior generals. The island commander reported directly to the Japanese Imperial Headquarters and received high priority in materiel for the defense, as this was the first part of the homeland to be invaded.

The ground was thoroughly organized. Defenses in depth took full advantage of the broken up terrain. Crevices, fissures, and hills contained concealed tanks, guns, and ground-level pillboxes. Artillery and mortars were registered on all critical points. This, together with excellent observation from the central upland and the 600' Mount Suribachi to the south, insured exceptional precision of fires on both the front lines and the beaches. Beach defenses were organized in depth, covering open areas with extensive antitank and machine gun defenses. The depth of the defenses, extending throughout the island, showed that, should counterattacks at the beachhead fail, the enemy plan was to hold every bit of ground as long as possible. Moreover, Japanese artillery was of heavier caliber than the U.S., while U.S. artillery was to prove largely ineffective against Japanese pillboxes.

To the north was a central, somewhat rugged upland. Near both coasts the terrain was extremely rugged, cut up, and admirably suited to strong, interlaced defenses, with superb observation. Intelligence for this operation was exceptionally good. Captured documents gave a fairly accurate picture of terrain and dispositions. Army and Navy aerial photos were consolidated by photo interpretation teams into a very accurate Joint Enemy Installation Map, supplemented by submarine observations. However, locations of targets were often not precise enough for best artillery accuracy, and the camouflage and concealment of Japanese emplacements made intelligence imperfect.

There were two operative airfields on the island and a third one under construction. The operative bases were used in intercepting U.S. strategic bombers enroute to Japan.

### The General Concept and Plan

The plan was to assault a beachhead from just north of Mt. Suribachi to East Boat Basin with two divisions (Map 1). 5th Marine Division, landing on the left, would cut the waist of the island, and seize Mt. Suribachi, while 4th Marine Division would pivot north to seize Airfield 1. 3rd Marine Division, loaded for piecemeal commitment, would remain as floating reserve until needed.

### UNIT BACKGROUND

The 25th Marines were activated May 1, 1943. The unit received initial training at Camp Lejeune during the summer. It then moved to Camp Pendleton, and there the 4th Marine Division was activated. Completely trained for amphibious operations, it sailed from San Diego on January 13, 1944, destined to go directly into an assault landing in Kwajalein Atoll. 2/25, commanded by Lt. Col Lewis C. Hudson, landed January 31, 1944, and captured Ennubir Island, against one-platoon opposition after a very turbulent ship-to-shore operation.

From February 8 to May 25, the division trained at Maui, Hawaii. Special training in landing techniques and pillbox assault took place, based on the Kwajalein Atoll experience. On May 25, the division sailed for the amphibious assault with the Northern Landing Force at Saipan. 2/25 was in the assault, D-Day June 15, 1944. Here it underwent its baptism of fire against severe opposition. The unit fought through both the campaign to seize Kagman Peninsula and the seizure of northern Saipan.

Immediately, 2/25 and the division were scheduled for the Tinian operation. This was a hastily planned shore-to-shore corps size operation against strong defenses. Only one rehearsal was held, but heavy preparatory fires preceded the operation. This landing, July 24, included a D-Day defense against a heavy tank-infantry counterattack and a

slogging advance across the island for the next week. The 4th Marine Division received a Presidential Unit Citation for the Saipan and Tinian campaigns.

Back on Maui, the 4th Marine Division began serious training for Iwo Jima late in October 1944. It now received nearly 7,000 replacements for its losses on Saipan and Tinian, and reinstated basic tactical training. After two exercises in combined arms operations and staff work, separate RCT's were joined; they then embarked at the beginning of January 1945.

A full-dress rehearsal of the Iwo Jima amphibious operation was held January 3-18 in Hawaii. After brief shore leave, the division sailed for Iwo Jima on January 27. 2/25 had been in the theater exactly one year. The core of the division (about 2/3) had been battle-tested in the Marianas. The CO, Lieut. Col. Hudson, had received the Legion of Merit for the Marianas operation. Hudson commanded the battalion from its departure from San Diego through February 20, 1945, when he was wounded on Iwo Jima. He was replaced by Lieut. Col. James Taul, who had been 3/25 Executive Officer in Saipan, Tinian, and Iwo Jima prior to the 20th. Battalion strength without attachments was about 880 for Iwo Jima.

#### PRE-ENGAGEMENT SITUATION AND OPERATIONS

##### The Division Plan: Organization and Scheme of Maneuver

The 4th Marine Division received the plans of operation DETACHMENT from the Landing Force Commander 4 months before the landing. It was to land on the right of 5th Marine Division, facing west, in a corps-size operation, then pivot northeast in the main effort to capture two airfields and gain control of the high cliff area near the beach and the eastern half of the upland center of the island. Here it would be expecting to meet the main concentration of the enemy's defenses.

The 3rd Marine Division was to serve as floating corps reserve, to be committed in either the 4th or 5th Marine Division sector. The 25th Marines were assigned the right flank zone of the division, while the 23rd, on its left, had the airfields as objective areas. The 24th Marines were to be in division reserve. The 4th Marine Division was to be supported by 14th Marines (artillery), to land on division order.

The beach area extended from north of Mount Suribachi to East Boat Basin. 25th Marines would land on the BLUE BEACH, 1/25 and 3/25 abreast, with 2/5 following as regimental reserve.

#### Missions

The Division mission was to seize the beachhead in its zone of action, advance to the portion of the O-1 line east of Airfield 1 (about 1100 yards inland) on D-Day, and consolidate its hold on the beachhead, prepared to attack north to seize the Motoyama Plateau on Corps order. 25th Marines' mission was to land on BLUE BEACH 1, seize the sector of the O-1 line in its zone, and assist 23rd Marines on its left in capturing Airfield 1. Its main thrust on the right was to be toward the high ground to the left of the quarry. It was also to capture BLUE BEACH 2. 23rd Marines on the left were to seize the O-1 line in their sector including Airfields 1 and 2, maintaining contact with 25th Marines on the right.

#### The Regimental Plan

3/25 and 1/25 were to land on BLUE BEACH 1 (see Map 1), with 3/25 on the right flank of the entire landing force. 3/25 was to rapidly seize BLUE BEACH 2 (too close to enemy gun positions for the initial landing), then advance to the O-1 line, envelop a quarry where the high ground provided good enemy observation and where gun positions enfilading the entire beachhead were to be destroyed. The 25th Marines were then to advance toward the D-Day O-1 line east of Airfield 1 and on to the

O-1 line extending about 1100 yards inland in a northeast direction. 2/25 was to land in regimental reserve on BLUE BEACH 1 on order, then move inland prepared for commitment as required.

#### Preparatory Fires

The island was softened by 72 days of aerial bombardment, which, however, proved less than effective because of Japanese cover and concealment. After a serious difference of view, in which the Marine planners sought 9 to 10 days' naval gunfire preparation, the preparation was limited to 3 days, to coincide with a major diversionary carrier attack on air bases and aircraft plants in the Tokyo area. While the Japanese decided to hold back their Fleet from an effort to engage the naval gunfire force, this force sought to destroy 724 major targets considered threats to ships, aircraft, and the ship-to-shore landing force. Their fires occurred over a period of three days. Six battleships, 4 heavy cruisers, 1 light carrier, and 16 destroyers took part. Each ship was assigned a grid square on Iwo Jima.

Bad weather seriously limited execution of the bombardment on February 16. Slightly better air and naval gunfire results were obtained the next day, including successful minesweeping and UDT operations, in the face of strong Japanese gunfire. On D-1, a heavy naval bombardment of the beach area was carried out from a range of 2500 yards, using 4 battleships and a heavy cruiser. Weather turned bad in the afternoon, but by then about 80 major gun emplacements had been destroyed. A major air attack had to be cancelled because of visibility, and most of the gun emplacements survived the bombardments and air attacks.

#### THE ENGAGEMENT

##### The Ship-to-Shore Movement

Fifty thousand marines lay offshore in transports. Weather was favorable. At 0640, the heavy support ships (6 battleships) began the

pre-H-hour bombardment. They were supported by 42 LCI gunboats firing 4.5-inch and 5-inch rockets, and 4.2-inch mortars.

At 0800, naval gunfire lifted, and 120 fighters and bombers hit close to the beaches in two waves, lasting 10 minutes. At 0825, the naval gunfire bombardment resumed from closer to shore. A rolling barrage was used, 400 yards ahead of the assault waves of infantry. At 0830, the assault waves headed for shore from a line 4,000 yards out. Ten waves landed at five-minute intervals, carrying 9,000 men ashore in 45 minutes. All went on schedule, the first wave landing between 0859 and 0903 (landing time was scheduled at 0900).

The beach turned out to be soft, thick, and slippery volcanic ash, and the troops moved forward painfully and with great effort. Five waves landed before the enemy responded. Moderate to heavy mortar fire fell, and soon many direct hits were scored on the landing craft. There was enormous congestion in the beach area. Under intense fire, the assault units began to push slowly inland.

#### 25th Marines Action Before the 2/25 Commitment to Combat

3/25 landed as scheduled, in a column of companies, to avoid boat congestion on the narrow (500-yard) two-battalion beach, BLUE 1. 1/25 landed 200 yards too far south, yet had to extend its left to gain contact with the 23rd Marines. 1/25 encountered heavy fire after advancing 25 yards. 3/25 had advanced 350 yards along the beach by 1007 under heavy fire from the cliff area, its left flank extending 400 yards inland, in contact with 1/25. It was receiving very heavy, accurate small arms fire from the cliff line at the quarry (Map 1). At 1017, the tanks landed, and their LSM's received heavy artillery fire. All tanks were landed, though the LSM's were all hit by artillery. The tanks managed to move inland, though slower than planned. because the bulldozer that was needed to cut a trail through the high back of the beach landed on the wrong beach.

Meanwhile, 3/25 reached its O-1 line (on the right of BLUE 2) about 1030. It reported very heavy casualties, and its companies were disorganized because two of them had landed several hundred yards south of BLUE 1. 1/25 was now 400 yards inland, pivoting to the north, and a 100-yard gap had developed between 1/25 and 3/25. 1/25 had also suffered heavy casualties, but by 1130 was nearly abreast of the eastern end of the east runway of Airfield 1.

Commitment of 2/25

By 1200, it had become clear that HILL 183, near the quarry, must soon be seized to reduce the severity of the fires against both battalions. But there was a one hundred-yard gap between the two battalions. The reserve battalion, 2/25 (Lieut. Colonel Lewis C. Hudson commanding), was now ordered to land on BLUE BEACH. It attacked in columns of companies (less one company) to fill the gap between 3/25 and 1/25. The regiment was then to advance with the mission of seizing HILL 183 and the adjacent high ground near the quarry.

At 1400, this coordinated attack started. At 1530, Cos. F and G were passed through Co. E. Elements of 2/25 advanced 100 yards but were driven back. 3/25 gained 200 yards in heavy fighting. The regimental commander requested artillery support, and the supporting artillery battalion, which landed late, was ready to fire missions in support of the regiment at 1700. At this point, 2/25 was authorized by the regimental commander to commit its remaining reserve company (H).

At 1630, Co. L, 3/25 was ordered to take the ridgeline west of the quarry and to make contact with 2/25, while Co. I was to move up the coast to East Boat Basin (Map 1). By 1830, 3/25 was so disorganized and had sustained such heavy casualties that the regimental commander received division permission to commit a company of 1/24 (this battalion had already been attached to the 25th). 3/25 and 2/25 seized the high ground around the quarry shortly after 1830. By 1900, 3/25

was down to 150 men. Because a counterattack was to be expected, the regimental commander obtained permission to use another company, C/1/24. He attached this company to 3/25, which then (at 1700) consolidated, leaving a 75-yard gap on its left which it had to cover by fire and observation. At 2330, two more companies (A and B) of 1/24 were put into the line, and the reduced-strength companies of 3/25 were pulled back to form a second defense line.

All D-Day the right and center of the 25th Marines had been under continuous artillery, rocket, and mortar fire. Evacuation of the wounded and resupply of the front-line units were most difficult. Virtually all landing craft came under artillery and mortar fire, and no road for vehicles could be built. The artillery battalion in support of the 25th was ashore by early evening, but had to take alternate positions as their planned firing positions had not been captured. The 75mm artillery had to be manhandled from the beaches. It completed registration at 1745. The night of D-Day there was no counter-attack, but heavy fires fell continually along the front, causing significant casualties, and the supply dump of 3/25 on the beach was destroyed by rockets.

#### D+1

All units in the north were about to enter a period of severe, costly combat, as they started a coordinated drive northward. Their line stretched 4,000 yards from the west coast just north of Mount Suribachi northeastward across the southern end of Airfield 1 to the East Coast Basin. Within 4th Division's sector, the battalions from left to right were 3/23, 3/24, 1/25, 2/25, and 3/25 + 2 cos. of 1/24. The initial objective was to seize the O-1 line. In the 4th Division's zone, this ran from the southern tip of Airfield 2 to East Boat Basin (Map 1).

Opposite them were General Kuribayashi's main forces. Most positions had survived the bombardment, and the ground was thoroughly organized for defense in hundreds of strong point positions.

Early this morning, a direct hit destroyed the 25th Marines' ammunition dump. At 0700, mortar fire hit the CP of 2/25 just above BLUE BEACH 1. The CO, Lieut. Colonel Hudson, the Executive Officer, Major William P. Kaempfer, and the Operations Officer, Major Donald K. Ellis, were seriously wounded. The CO of the supporting Company B, 4th Tank Battalion, was killed. Lieut. Colonel James Taul, Executive Officer of 3/25, took command. (It was, of course, 3/25 which had had the most severe fighting and highest casualties on D-Day.)

Within an hour, 2/25 together with 1/25 reinforced by 2 companies of 1/24 jumped off with 3/25 in reserve. The objective was to seize the O-1 line. 2/25 was to seize the high ground to its front and keep contact with 1/25 on its left. The Japanese had observation of every position and had pre-registered. Fires from pillboxes in interlocking bands began cutting companies to pieces. Marine counterbattery fire was ineffective for lack of guns and because their caliber could not damage the emplacements. Some Japanese fires to the rear prevented even LVT's from resupplying the 25th units.

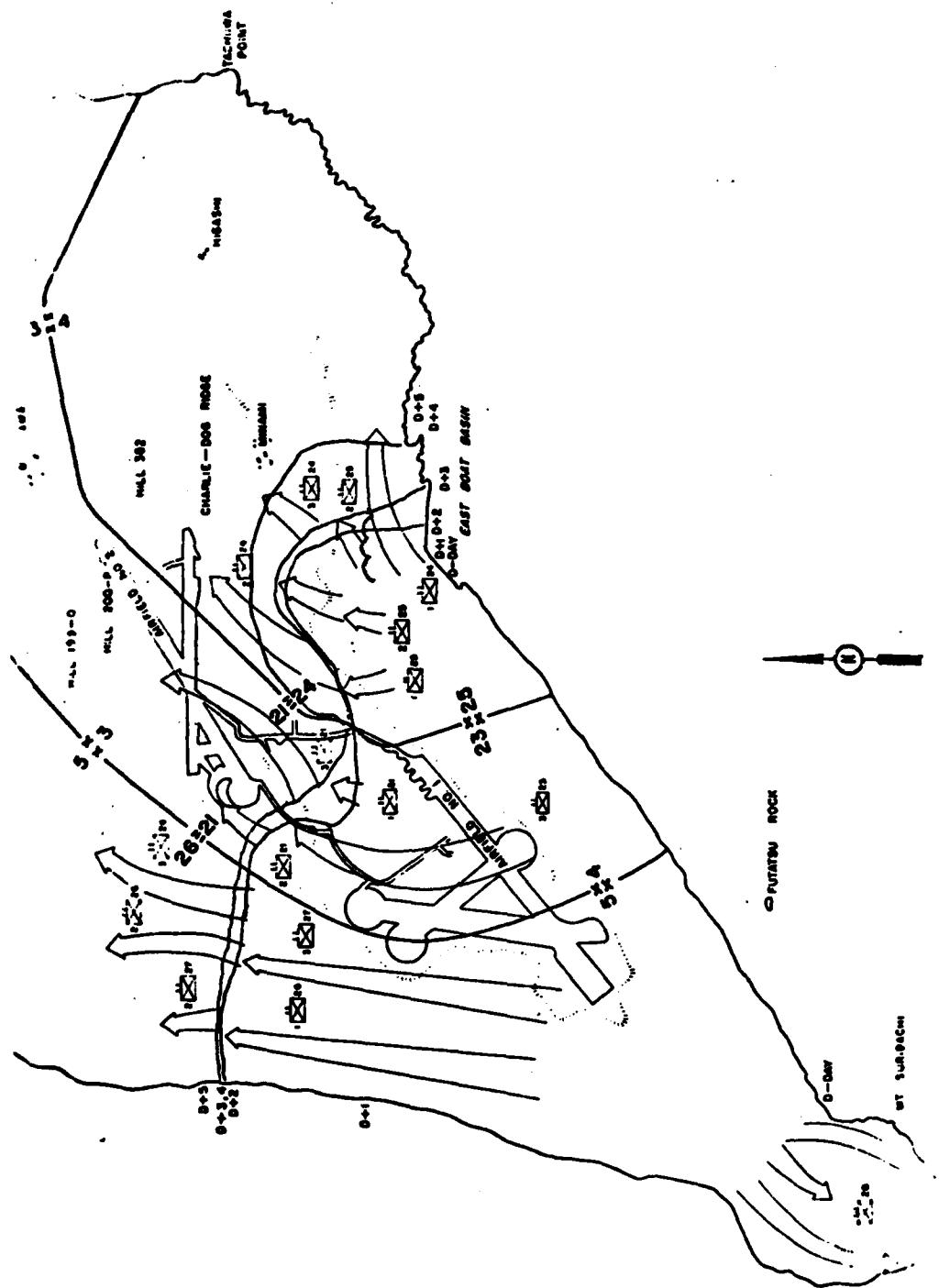
At 1600, a close air support attack mistakenly hit 1/24, causing 11 casualties. Then two cruiser salvos landed in front of 1/24, causing 90 Marine casualties. By 1800, 2/25 (and 1/25 as well) had gained 200 to 300 yards, but the left flank of 1/25 had been unable to advance, so 2/25 had to hold up. They were then ordered to dig in, consolidate, and make firm contact with adjacent units. Airfield 1 had now been captured. 4th Marine Division casualties for the two days were 2,000. On the two-division front, casualties were 3000, while 640 enemy dead had been counted.

Because of the unexpected resistance, the Corps Commander this day ordered 21st Marines, part of the Corps reserve, to land. They managed to land the next day, D+2. 3/14 (supporting artillery) was in position just beyond YELLOW 1 and RED 2 beaches by 1730. But 4/14 met disaster in landing. Ten out of 12 guns were lost in the water due to heavy seas and overloading. One battery of 155mm's landed that day. The Corps Commander now advanced the date for landing 9th Marines and the remaining Division artillery.

For all these troubles, the beachhead was now 3,000 yards wide. However, the O-1 line had not been reached at any point. Because the beaches were overloaded, heavy fires raked them. Supplies were now carried from the sea directly to combat units in amphibious vehicles, as wheeled vehicles could not get traction over the beaches.

D+2 (See Map Two)

Jump-off of the two divisions was preceded by a preparation by 12 destroyers, 2 cruisers, 68 aircraft, and 33 Howitzers. 25th Marines continued with 1/25, 2/25, and 1/24 (the whole battalion) in line, 3/25 in reserve. The objective was the quarry area northwest of East Boat Basin. Against weakening resistance, the regiment had gained from 50-300 yards by noon, while suffering heavy casualties including the death of the CO of 1/25. By now there was a serious gap between 1/25 and 2/25. 3/25 was committed to fill the gap under heavy fire, and accomplished this by 1700. U.S. air and naval gunfire was very effective this day. Some 32 strikes of squadron size were made in front of the two divisions, while a destroyer and two cruisers delivered deep support fires. By 1800, 21st Marines were ashore, in an assembly area on the edge of Airfield 1. 4th Marine Division Headquarters' landing was delayed to D+3. This night enemy aircraft, including Kamikazes, scored hits on the outer ring of warships. In 4th Marine Division sector, throughout a rainy night, the enemy kept troops on alert with small local counterattacks and steady artillery and mortar fires.



MAP 2

D+3

On the left of the 4th Marine Division sector, the 21st Marines relieved 23rd Marines in a heavy downpour. The relief took 6 hours. In this sector, forces were still 1200 yards short of the O-1 line. The 25th Marines remained on the line, with 1/24 on the right and 2/25 in the center. To their left were 3/25, then 1/25 (Map 2). The objectives were: first straighten the regimental line to conform to the advance of the 21st, then to seize the O-1 line in a coordinated attack. But the 21st made no advance, so the 25th was confined to making limited attacks alone. After a limited advance by 1/25, with 3/25 and 2/25 marking time until the line was straightened, a naval rocket attack killed 800 Japanese northwest of the quarry.

At 1530, the Japanese counterattacked. The CO, 3/25 was severely wounded, and a Captain took command. 2/25, kept stationary by orders that morning, took heavy casualties while stopping the counterattack. At 1830, another counterattack formed in front of 2/25 which heavy weapons and artillery fires broke up. This was another wet, cold night with continual enemy fires. One hundred Japanese tried to infiltrate 2/25 and 3/25; so there was little sleep.

D+4

The 4th Marine Division objective was to reach the O-2 line, and to take Airfield 2, with the main effort on the left. Opposing in the main defense line was the best Japanese regiment on Iwo Jima, the 145th. The 26th Marines on the left were driven back, and the 21st Marines in the center were unable to advance. By now, the entire 24th Marines was on the right of the 25th. They advanced 300 yards, the only significant gain of the day. 25th Marines consolidated their positions, not having had an attack mission. 2/25 this day held a second line behind 1/24 and 3/24.

D+5

In a strong, coordinated attack, 4th Division jumped off. Its objective was to seize all of Airfield 2. The hardest fighting was on the right (24th Marines with 2/25 attached). By 1100, the 24th was approaching the eastern end of the airfield. That afternoon, with 2/25 protecting the right flank, 24th Marines began an assault with the objective to seize CHARLIE-DOG RIDGE, part of the most heavily defended area of Iwo Jima and approaching the highest elevation, HILL 382. It gained the ridge with heavy losses at 1530. At 1600, the Japanese launched a heavy mortar barrage which drove 2/24 and 3/24 off the ridge. On the right, 1/24 and 2/25 could make only minor progress this day in support of the 24th objective, because of the extremely broken terrain near the coast. By now, 4th Marine Division's combat efficiency was down to 60%, while 5th Marine Division had lost 3,000, slightly less.

This ends the engagement of 2/25, but not its fighting. 3rd Marine Division now took over the center. 4th Marine Division took over the eastern one-third and fought through extremely difficult terrain. Lt. Col. Taul continued in command, and 2/25 was again engaged in an active front two days later.

#### AFTER-ACTION SUMMARY

On D-Day, 2/25, using two companies, made limited progress (100 yards). After being authorized to commit its 3rd company, the unit was able, together with 3/25, to capture the high ground approaching the quarry. On D+1, 2/25 advanced about 200-300 yards, short of its hill objective, against intense fires. On D+2, 2/25 with units of the 24th gained its objective, the quarry, but 3/25 had to fill a gap between 1/25 and 2/25. On D+3, the 25th Marines were held up on orders, awaiting the delayed 21st Marines, so made only limited attacks. That night 2/25 fought off two counterattacks and an infiltration attempt. On D+4, the 25th Marines had no attack mission, while a main effort was made by the

23rd on their right. On D+5 morning, the 24th with 2/25 attached, seized all of Airfield 2 (carrying them beyond the O-1 line). In the 2/25 sector the advance was limited as rugged terrain was encountered.

The chief obstacles met were heavy, carefully coordinated fires from concealed and protected positions, together with artillery and mortar fires which friendly fire was unable to suppress. U.S. artillery was not heavy enough to take out the protected Japanese gun positions.

2/25 had taken heavy casualties. Its casualties from D-Day through D+5 were approximately 190. Japanese casualties were estimated at more than 400. Overall, the U.S. in Iwo Jima had higher casualties than the Japanese. The Division suffered 40.4% casualties on Iwo Jima.

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**ENGAGEMENT 27. BATTALION AMPHIBIOUS LANDING OPERATION, 2ND BATTALION, 2ND MARINES, 2D MARINE DIVISION, WITH ITS REGIMENT, AT BETIO ISLAND, TARAWA ATOLL, GILBERT ISLANDS, NOVEMBER 20, 1944**

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**INTRODUCTION**

This engagement describes the operations of the 2d Battalion, 2d Marines, from an amphibious assault landing, planned for a reinforced regiment but ultimately involving the entire Division, to assurance of capture of the island on D+3.

The sections of this engagement report and their subject matter are:

**• General Preparations**

This describes the strategy, explains the command structure, summarizes the known intelligence, and outlines the plan and scheme of attack.

**• Unit Background**

This summarizes the organizing of the battalion and its parent units, its early training, and its combat experience at Guadalcanal. It also explains its training status and rehearsals in preparation for the Betio operation.

**• Pre-Engagement Situation and Operations**

This more explicitly explains the command structure, status, and missions; and explains the deployment and preparatory fire plans for the landing.

**• The Engagement**

This describes the D-Day deployment, fires, and ship-to-shore movement and D-Day situation ashore; and, for D+1 through D+3, the objectives, scheme of attack, and results.

**• After-Action Summary**

This summarizes the objectives achieved by 2/2, the major obstacles encountered, and the scale of casualties on both sides.

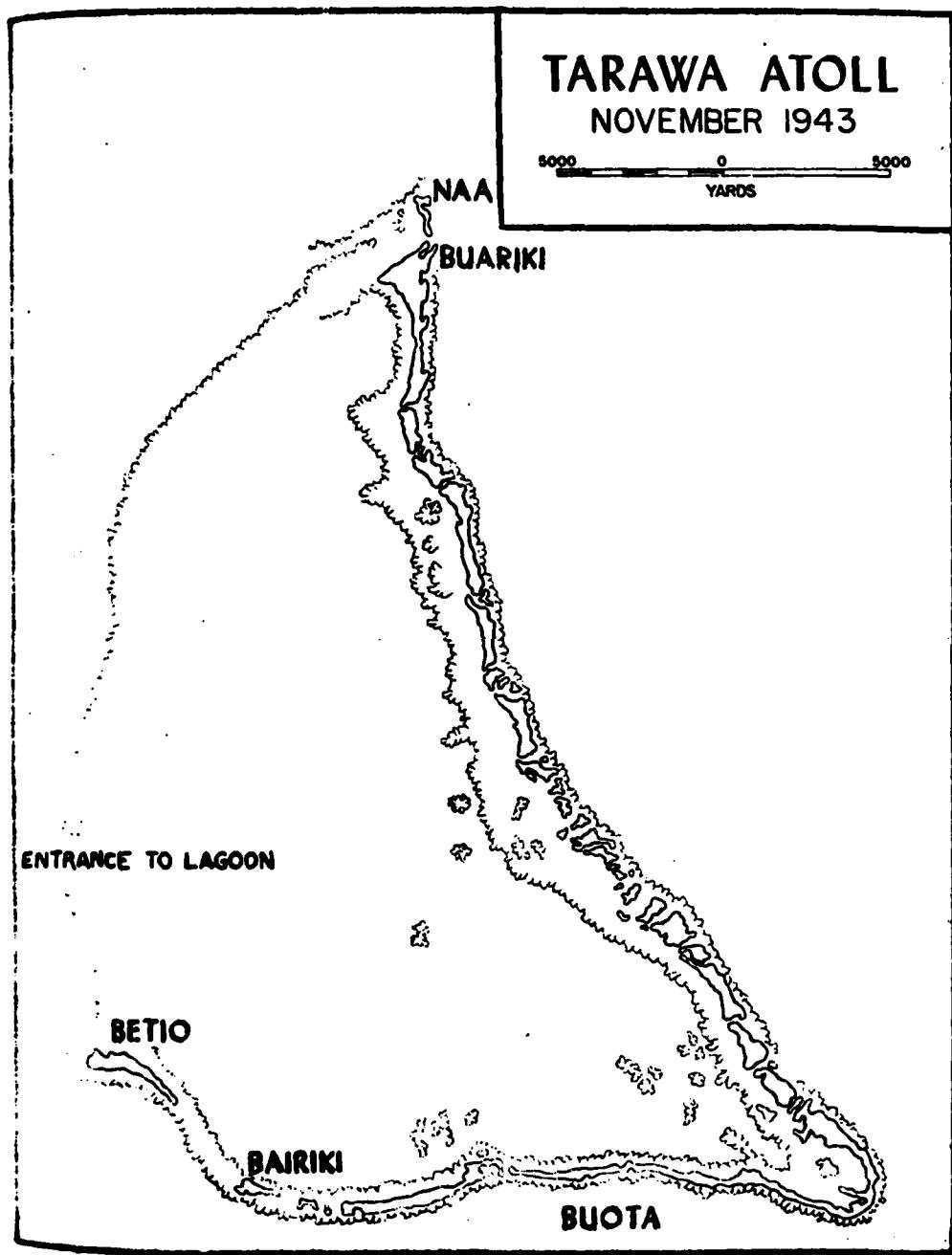
## GENERAL PREPARATION

### Strategy and Command Structure

The plan to seize Tarawa Atoll, including the key Betio Island, in the Gilberts, decided in the summer of 1943, was the beginning of the Central Pacific campaign. Naval and air bases in the Gilbert Islands would support operations against the Marshalls and also strengthen the naval links to the Southwest Pacific. The key targets in the Gilberts were the Makiu and Tarawa atolls. Supported by major elements of the Pacific under Admiral Spruance, the Gilberts landings were the responsibility of V Amphibious Force, commanded by Rear Admiral Richmond K. Turner. The V Amphibious Corps, formed September 4, 1943, under Major General Holland K. Smith, was the land force element. The Tarawa part of the operation was commanded by Rear Admiral Harry W. Hill. D-Day was November 20, allowing two months planning. The major land force was to be the 2d Marine Division, Major General Julian C. Smith commanding.

### Intelligence

The United States started with sketchy intelligence concerning Tarawa. But within a month, aerial and submarine photography plus information from ex-residents permitted an accurate estimate of the Japanese strength and excellent knowledge of the water approaches (Map 1). The triangular atoll had a string of reef fringed islands off the southern and western coasts. Off the west coast was a barrier reef with a one-mile gap, north of Betio, through which warships could enter the lagoon and approach the Betio beaches. The atoll was 12 miles (southern leg) by 12-1/2 (western leg) by 18-1/2 (northeastern leg). Betio was about 10,500 feet long and about 1800 feet wide at its middle. It contained an excellent airfield, covering more than half the island, which the United States needed for air attacks against the Marshalls.



MAP 1

The enemy were mainly Naval Special Landing Force troops, the equivalent of U.S. Marines. These were crack troops. Troop strength was estimated at 2500 to 2700, a large force for so small an island. They were cross-trained as infantry, and as coastal or AA gunners. There were believed to be eight or nine 8" coastal guns, 12 heavy and 12 medium AA guns, and emplacements for about 130 antiboat and AA automatic weapons (from heavy machine guns to 40mm). These estimates were very accurate (Map 2).

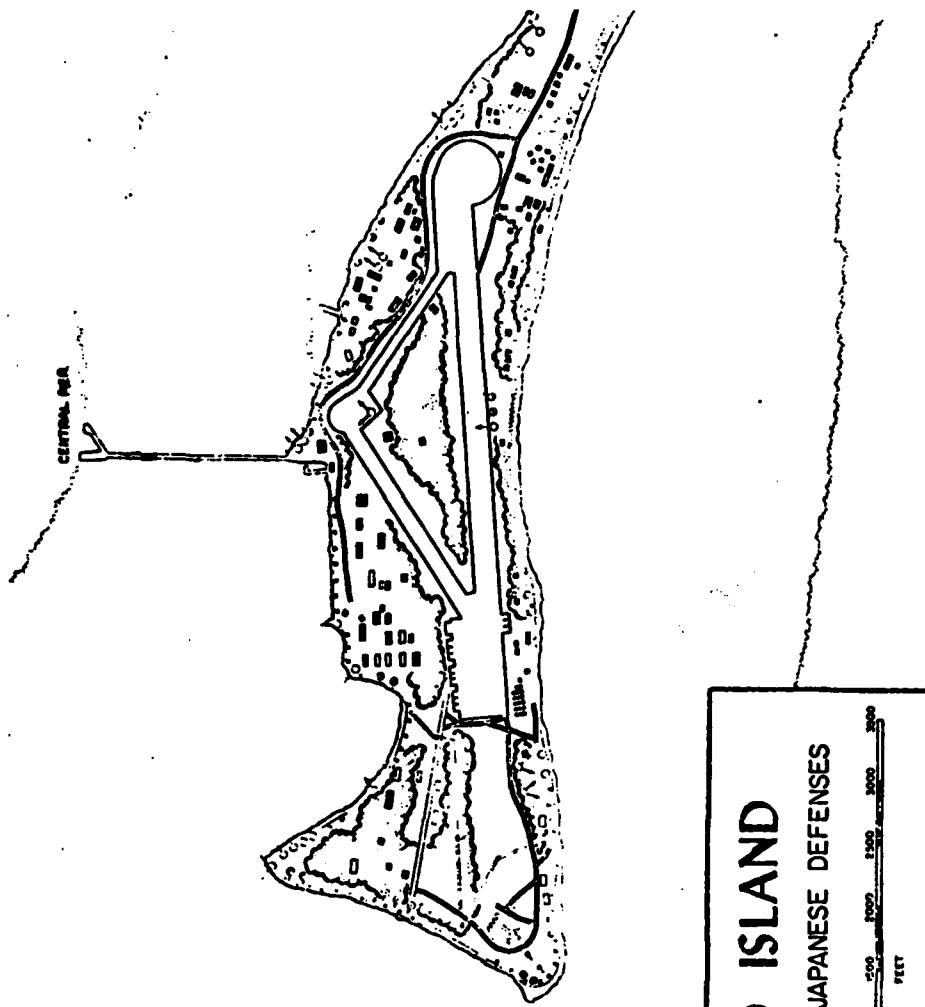
#### The Plan

Getting over the reefs was critical to the landing. A shortage of LVT's required using LCVP's with a 3-1/2 foot draft. The exact depth of water, in dispute, was critical to movement beyond the reef. Would it be 3' (serious problems) or 5' (fine)? General Smith chose pessimism, and troops were trained to wade ashore. Furthermore, troops would land on the lagoon side, to minimize ocean surf.

Admiral Hill's Task Force 53 would seize Tarawa; Carrier Task Force 50 would gain aerial superiority, neutralize Japanese defenses, and spot for naval gunfire. Land-based Air Task Force 57 would help gain air superiority by softening up nearby Japanese air bases.

#### The Scheme of Attack

The Corps Commander decided on a direct assault on Betio by the 2d Marines, plus one battalion of the 8th Marines, holding the 6th Marines in Corps Reserve, and 8th Marines (-) in Division reserve. (The Division Commander had preferred landing artillery first on an adjacent island.) Landings would be on the north side of the island. Thus, the plan envisaged assaulting with four reinforced infantry battalions (one landing on call), plus a Division reserve of two battalions as probably sufficient to capture the island. For insurance, another regiment was in Corps reserve afloat.



**BETIO ISLAND**

SHOWING MAIN JAPANESE DEFENSES

MAP 2

A-66

### UNIT BACKGROUND

The 2d Marine Division was activated in February 1941 at New River, North Carolina, its core being the 6th Marines, which had been an active unit since 1937. One year earlier, the 6th had provided a cadre to form the 8th Marines, together with which it had become a brigade. In 1942 these regiments became part of the 2d Marine Division, when one battalion from the 6th and one from the 8th were used to form the third regiment, the 2nd Marines. The 10th artillery joined at this time.

In May 1942, the division was "cannibalized" to form a Provisional Brigade (mainly 6th Marines), which was sent to Iceland. The 2nd and 8th Marines continued to train at Camp Elliott, California.

After these two regiments briefly manned California coast defenses following Pearl Harbor, a new Provisional Brigade was formed including the 8th Marines, and moved to Samoa. Meanwhile, 2d Division Headquarters and the 2nd Marines remained to train recruits at San Diego. The Division was up to strength for a short while in 1942. Then, the 2d Marines, heavily reinforced, were loaded and shipped to Fiji. There on July 26 it rendezvoused afloat with ships carrying the 1st Marine Division, held hasty landing rehearsals, and sailed for Guadalcanal.

The 2nd Marines fought initially on Tulagi and neighboring islands as separate battalions, then on Guadalcanal as battalions and as a regiment, and finally, in the mopping-up operations, as part of the division. The Guadalcanal campaign made hardened jungle fighters of the 2d Marines and its division. But the cost in health was high. The 2d Marine Division reached New Zealand with 12,500 cases of malaria. As late as October 1943, 40 men per day were hospitalized; and many were evacuated to the United States.

On May 1, 1943, Major General Julian Smith took command of the 2d Marine Division. Replacements now flowed in steadily.

The 2nd Marines were by now experienced in jungle warfare, but not in landing over a reef on an atoll. They were experienced in small-unit tactics, but their training in large-unit operations was limited.

2nd Marines, as was true of the Division, had a strong core of experienced men spread among the replacements. Basic training was emphasized, but infantry-tank-demolition operations were not.

The division was triangular, with a strength of about 19,000. 2d Marines was 3220 strong; with its service reinforcements it was about 5400 strong. For the Betio landing, the 2nd Battalion, 8th Marines was attached. 2/2, with 37 officers and 881 EM, was organized with the usual Headquarters Company and 3 rifle companies. Commanding 2/2 was Lieut. Colonel Herbert R. Aney, Jr., who was to be killed in action in the water on D-Day.

In September 1943 battalion landing team practice began; thereafter regimental-size landings were practiced at Hawke Bay, Wellington, and Paekakariki, New Zealand.

Transport were brought into the Task Force, which tended to be rapidly modified, and their crews hastily trained for the November 20 landing.

On November 1, the troops embarked at Wellington. They sailed for Efate, New Hebrides, where a landing practice was held and naval gunfire simulated. A second rehearsal took place at Mele Bay. Here Lieut. Colonel David M. Shoup replaced the ill regimental commander and was spot-promoted.

#### PRE-ENGAGEMENT SITUATION AND OPERATIONS

##### The Landing Force

The assault would be made from the north over the RED BEACHES. The assaulting force would be the 2d Marines plus 2/8 attached, plus normal

attachments for amphibious operations. For 2/2 the main attachments would be (1) a platoon of Sherman tanks and a battery of 75mm Pack Howitzers, both to revert to control of their parent units soon after landing (when parent units were ready to assume control), (2) a platoon of Engineers, which provided demolition and flame thrower teams, and (3) one platoon, regimental Heavy Weapons Co.

#### Missions

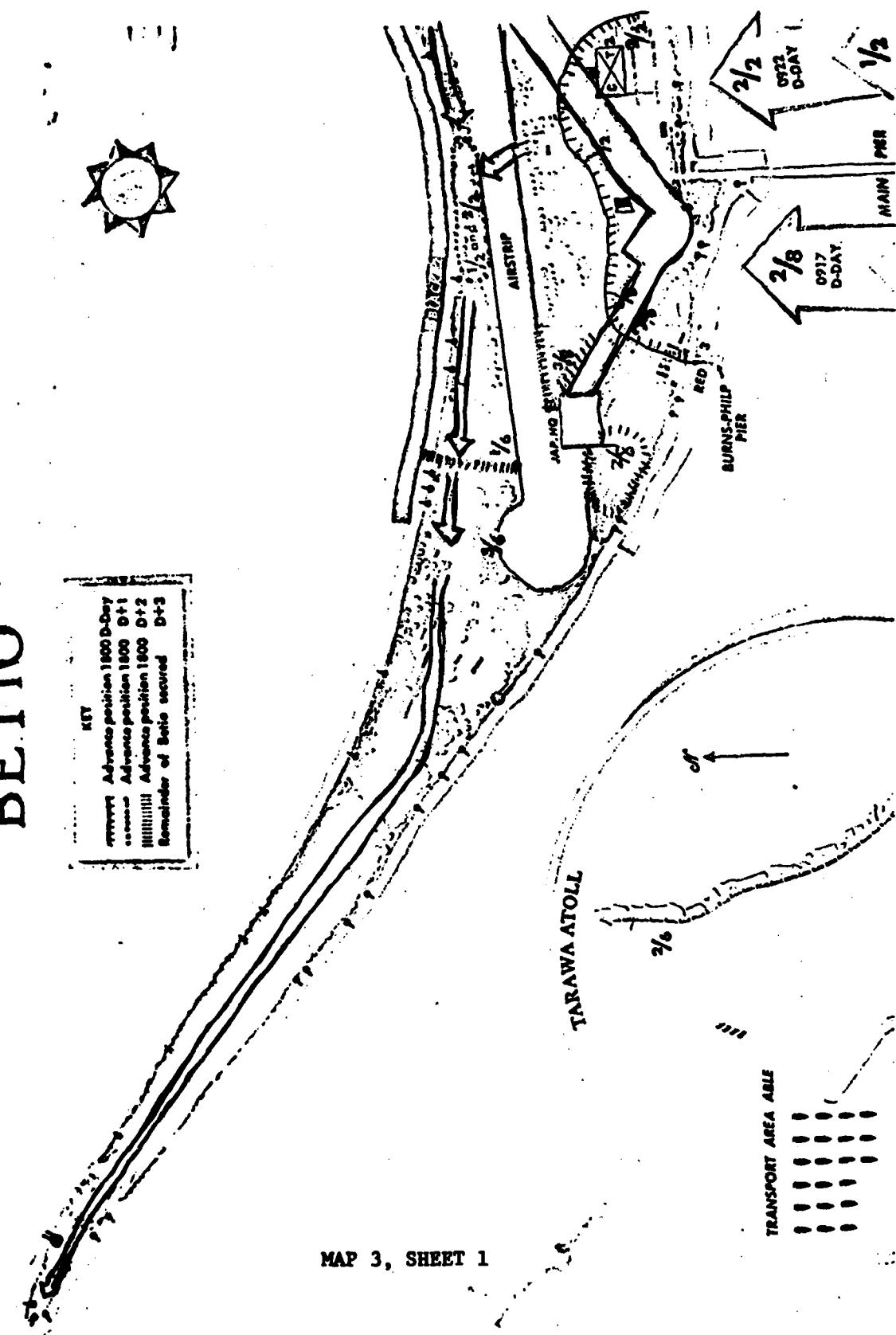
The Division Mission was to land on the north coast of Betio in order to seize and occupy the island and prepare for further operations ashore. The Mission of 2nd Marines was to land with three BLT's abreast on Beaches RED 1, RED 2, and RED 3 and capture and hold the island of Betio. CT2 included 2/8. CT8 (-) was Division Reserve. CT6 was Corps Reserve. (See Map 3, which is on the following two pages.)

2d Marines assigned 2/2 the mission "land with assault units in LVT's on RED 2 at H-Hour, attack and seize O-1 in its zone of action" (Map 4). The O-1 line ran roughly parallel to the RED BEACHES, about halfway between the north and south shores. The right boundary of 2/2 ran inland in prolongation of the land indentation and approximately perpendicular to RED 2 (its left boundary was in prolongation of the pier). A second 2/2 mission was, on order, to seize the O-3 line (Map 4). This was the south shore in its zone of action.

3/2 on the right had an identical mission, except that it would land on RED 1. Its "on order" mission was to attack to seize the O-2 line (the GREEN BEACH and its boundary flanking 2/2).

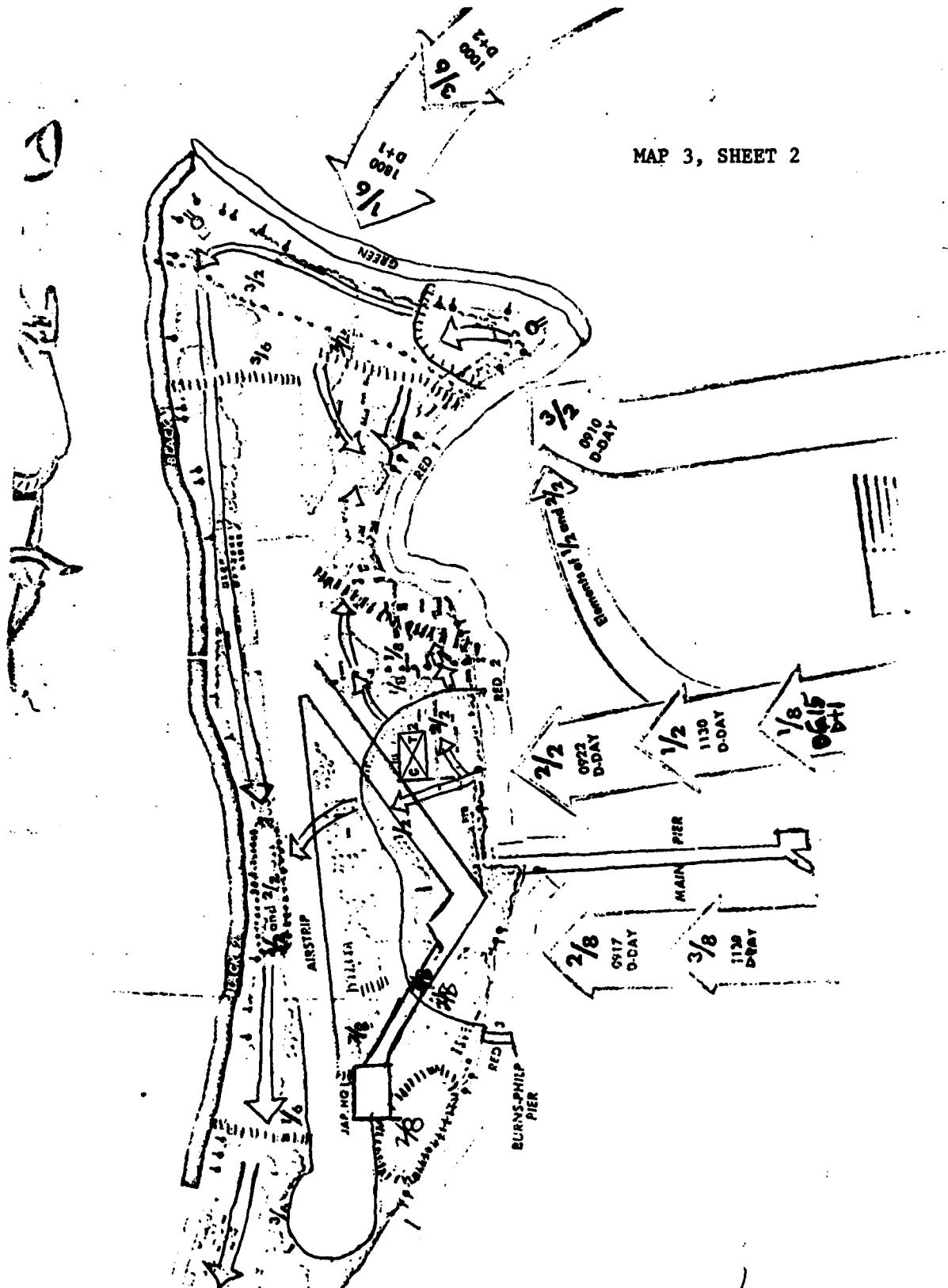
2/2 orders amplifying its missions were: "Co. E land on right half of RED 2, Co. F the left half (both at H-hour); Co. G land at H+6 minutes, prepared to support or relieve Co. E or F; 2d Platoon, Regimental Headquarters Co. land at H+14 minutes and support the assault

# BETIO



MAP 3, SHEET 1

MAP 3, SHEET 2



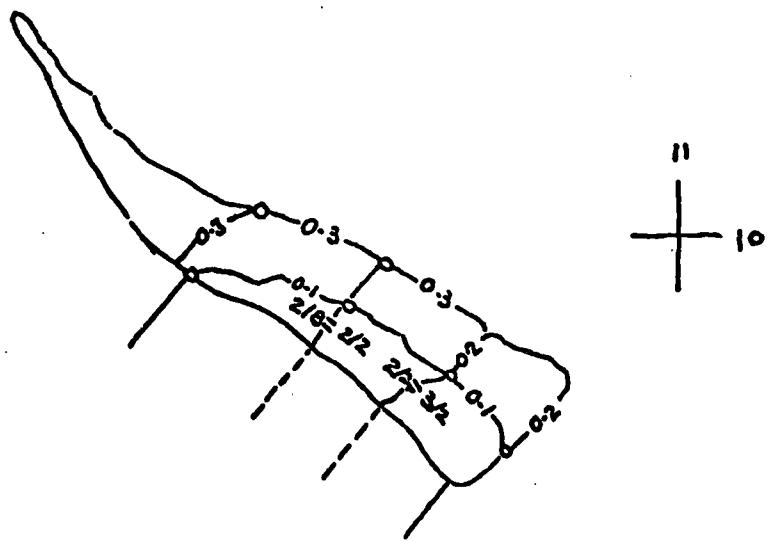
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No. 22

Hq, CT 2  
In the Field  
29 Oct 43, 1800

Annex ABLE to Opn O No 16 (Tng)

OPN OVERLAY



Map Ref: Annex ABLE to Div Opn Plan No 5-43 (Tng)

BY ORDER OF COLONEL MARSHALL

JOHNSTON  
*X*

MAP 4

A-72

companies with fire, Co. H land at H+26, prepared to support either Co. E or F with fires; tank platoon land at H+20, then proceed to beach rendezvous area."

#### Approach Plan

During the bombardment phase, the assault landing elements and 2 destroyers would enter the lagoon, then deploy to start the landing from the Line of Departure. The attack convoy was led by two minesweepers, followed by the destroyer screen, the LST's carrying the tanks, and finally by the disembarked troops (they disembarked outside the lagoon) in landing craft. Meanwhile, warships for gunfire support would fire from deployments on all three sides of the island.

#### Preparatory Fires

On D-2, Betio was shelled by a Cruiser Division from 25,000 to 30,000 yards range. On D-2 and D-1 a carrier group and a task force of Seventh Air Force bombed the island. The remaining preparatory fires took place on D-Day. The plan was to deliver intensive gunfire for 75 minutes, both to neutralize the defenses (area fires) and to perform counterbattery missions, the latter from a range of 2,000 yards. This was to be preceded by a 30-minute beach strafing attack, and followed at H-10 minutes with another strafing attack. Preceding the latter, gunfire for 45 minutes was to destroy emplacements in the beach areas and neutralize defenses on neighboring islands.

#### THE ENGAGEMENT

At midnight, D-Day, the assault force was off Betio without Japanese interference. AT 0355, the transports began unloading, but in the wrong area because of tides. They were ordered north. Those LCVP's already embarked were unable to keep up, and rounding them up delayed the landing. At 0507, shore batteries began firing, and warships attempted to

reduce them. Naval gunfire then ceased, awaiting the air attack. The carrier planes did not arrive at dawn as planned due to a failure in pre-planning communications between the air task forces and Admiral Hill's headquarters. At 0605, Admiral Hill resumed fire. At sunrise, approximately 0613, the planes arrived, and bombed and strafed for 10 minutes (causing little damage or casualties), while naval gunfire was withheld.

The lagoon entrance was then swept, and the destroyers entered. The assault waves were 24 minutes behind schedule. Landing was postponed from 0830 to 0900. The radios of the command ship Maryland were knocked out by gunfire concussion. Meanwhile, the aircraft for the pre-H-hour strike arrived and struck too early. Communications were re-established, and some aircraft were held off. They later completed the remaining strikes on schedule.

The only results of the preparatory fires and bombing were to disrupt Japanese communications and knock out a few coastal guns. Virtually all pillboxes and guns survived.

#### THE SHIP-TO-SHORE AND D-DAY BEACH OPERATION

The reef, instead of being under 3-1/2 feet of water, was exposed in many places, though in some spots there were two feet of water. The LVT amphibious vehicles could cross these, but the follow-up waves had either to transload to LVT's (as planned), or because of Japanese fires on the reef or lack of returning LVT's, wade the 500-800 yards remaining. These follow-up waves faced withering fires from concealed positions on the beaches and, for a while, from under the pier.

The assault waves suffered fewer casualties than the follow-up waves; but, except on RED 3, they were still heavy. On RED 3, 2/8 had the best success. On no beaches were the amphibs able to carry the troops inland as planned. The LVT's became jammed up on the beaches, and many, desperately needed for succeeding waves of infantry, were lost.

2/2 received the worst fires. Anti-boat guns knocked out some LVT's and many LCVP's in the follow-up waves. A strong pillbox at the base of the pier held out through D+2. The unwounded of Co. F and Co. E (-) reached RED 2 at 0922, fought through barbed wire, and established a beachhead 50 yards deep. One platoon was driven off course by fires and landed on RED 1 where it had to be consolidated with 3/2. (In all, 4 platoons of 2/2 landed on RED 1, driven there by heavy fire.) One half of Co. F were casualties. Although Co. G landed on time, it also suffered heavy casualties.

The 3rd, 4th, and 5th waves in LCVP's and LCM's, with reserve infantry, artillery, and tanks, came ashore, most of the infantry wading. The tanks were mainly under their own power (one-half drowned). Only a few came in LVT's. Virtually none landed as organized units.

The CO 2/2, Lieut. Colonel Aney was killed while wading ashore. Lt. Colonel Walter I. Jordan, a 4th Marine Division observer, took command pending arrival of the Executive Officer, Major Howard L. Rice. But he did not land until afternoon, and then on RED 1. He did not reach his unit until D+2.

Ashore, the demolition teams destroyed a number of pillboxes on RED 2, but 2/2 was unable to advance. 3/2 got one company ashore intact on RED 1, but the other 2 companies took 35% casualties as the men waded ashore. Its battalion commander was not able to land until late afternoon. A major acting as Company Commander organized a composite battalion from the remnants of 3/2, plus almost a company of 2/2, and succeeded in establishing a shallow beachhead on the tip of the island (Map 3).

Under a hail of fire and by night Colonel Shoup, 2d Marines CO, managed to establish a CP on the pier, against a pillbox occupied by 26 defenders. At 0959, the CO 3/2 at the reef notified him that his beachhead was in doubt and his remaining reserves had been cut to pieces at the

reef. Colonel Shoup then ordered 1/2 to land on RED 2 and attack to relieve 3/2 on RED 1. Much of this battalion landed by dark, but over 100 landed on RED 1 and joined the forces there.

Late in the morning, 3/8, one of two division reserve battalions, was committed over RED 3. This battalion was caught in heavy fire beyond the reef. Many drowned or were killed. A minority found refuge under the pier and gradually made their way ashore.

Throughout this period, communications were slow, and some orders for force commitments were not received. 3/2 was out of communication until the next day, but organized a force from remnants of 3 battalions on RED 1, and was able by afternoon to hold a beach 150 yards wide and 350 yards deep. There was a 600-yard gap, then 1/2 held a beachhead 350 yards deep, to the end of the airfield runway. 2/2 held an area 200-250 yards deep, bending back to the pier. It was supported late on D-Day by three medium tanks firing point-blank at pillbox apertures.

Before dawn, the Corps reserve, 6th Marines, had been released to Division. Now Division ordered its last other battalion, 1/8, to the Line of Departure, to land as Colonel Shoup might require. The battalion never got his order to land at 1625 over RED 2 and attack west. At midnight Corps discovered this, and the battalion finally had to land against heavy fire on D+1.

During the night, communications to the Corps Commander had to be by messenger. Commander of all forces ashore continued to be the CO, 2nd Marines, himself forced to rely on messengers.

The situation was now critical, especially if the enemy counterattacked. The Japanese did not, apparently because their communications were paralyzed. The flow of supplies to the Marines had been critically slowed by fires, lack of boats, shortage of men, and crowding at the beach.

At this time, the numbers of opposing combat forces were about equal but late at night, five 75mm Pack Howitzers were landed on RED 2 and were ready to fire by dawn the next day.

D+1

1/8 finally received its orders to land over RED 2 at 0615 and reinforce 2/2. From the reef in, 1/8 suffered heavy casualties from flanking machine gun and anti-boat fires as heavy as on D-Day so that by 0800 only one-half the battalion was ashore.

The D+1 regimental plan was for 1/8 (attached) to attack west toward RED 1 Beach, while 1/2 and 2/2 cut straight across the island. 3/2 was to secure GREEN BEACH (via land) while 2/8 cleaned out a pocket at the Burns-Philp Pier on the left flank of the beachhead.

1/8 reached the RED beachhead but was stalled. The remnants of 2/2 (50 to 75 men of 3 companies) together with 2 companies of 1/2 fought their way to the south coast. One company of 1/2 remained stalled at the runway in the morning. Lieut. Colonel Jordan made his way to the south coast, where a 200-yard perimeter was formed, and took command of the remnants of 2/2 plus the two companies of 1/2. Late in the day, the third company of 1/2 broke through and reached the east flank of the south coast perimeter.

The CO 1/2 now assumed command, and Lieut. Colonel Jordan reverted to his observer status. This perimeter force was too weak and short of ammunition to attack further so it consolidated its perimeter for the night. Orders to attack east toward 2/8 this day were cancelled by the regimental CO, after 2/2 (-) withheld a counterattack and suffered heavy casualties. By nightfall, the northern beachhead was 400 to 500 yards deep; but west of the runway-taxi strip corner there was a 250-yard gap between 1/8 and the south shore beachhead (Map 3). On the

south shore directly opposite the pier, 200 yards of coast were held by a strongly entrenched enemy.

Meanwhile at the western end of the island, elements of 1/2 and 2/2 fought alongside 3/2 and secured GREEN BEACH. Aided by naval gunfire, this force cracked the gun emplacements and by late afternoon held a strip 200 yards inland on GREEN BEACH. Over this heavily mined beach 1/6 had landed in rubber boats (because of mines) after major delays, including a 1200 yard approach in their boats. 1/6 prepared to attack at dawn, D+2.

During the day, the supply situation was improved by commandeering LVT's still aboard ship, unloading supplies on the pier, and using the LVT's to carry supplies from there to front-line troops. In the afternoon, the CO 2nd Marines finally was convinced that the beachhead could be held.

#### D+2

As the island lacked hill masses and was small, no maneuver could be concealed. Advances were normally by small teams, which knocked out pillboxes with demolitions. At 2030, Colonel Edson, Division Chief of Staff, came ashore and assumed command from Colonel Shoup. The day was featured by 2/8 capturing three strong-points near the Burns-Philps Pier. (For 1800 positions, see Map 3.) 2/1 (plus 2/2) enlarged the south shore beachhead and made a limited advance eastward.

#### D+3

At the start of the third day, the Marine numerical advantage was about 7 to 1, compared to 1 to 1 the end of D-Day. Naval gunfire on the eastern half of the island was requested, delivered to within 500 yards of friendly troops. There were 20-minute bombardments at 0700, 0830, 0930, and 1030.

The positions at this time were as follows. On GREEN BEACH were 1/6 and the composite battalion 3/2. The main line was held on the right facing east, anchored on the south coast by the combined 1/2 - 2/2 battalion. Facing west from the western runway was 1/8, while 2/8 and parts of 3/8 faced east near the Burns-Philp Pier. There was a big gap between them and 1/8. Strong Japanese fortifications were held at the boundary of RED 1 and RED 2. The day's plan was: 1/6 to pass through 3/2, advance along the south shore, and link up with 1/2; 1/8 to attack west along the lagoon shore and eliminate the enemy pocket at the juncture of RED 1 and 2. 2/8 and 3/8 were to attack east and destroy defenses holding up 2/8. (By the end of the day the attack would be supported by a battalion of artillery on Bairiki Island to the east.)

1/8 made slow progress, but isolated the remaining enemy pocket. Aided by tanks, 1/6 moved fast and made contact with 1/2 and elements of 2/2 at 1100, killing 250 Japanese en route. 2/8 and 3/8 now cracked pill-boxes and shelters against a heavy defense. This carried the attack to the eastern end of the airfield. 3/8 landed over GREEN BEACH and followed the route of 1/6, backing it up.

The Marine line now stretched across the island at the eastern end of the airfield, confining the enemy to its strong defenses at the eastern end. It appeared that all three battalions of the 6th Marines would be needed to finish the job, but three counterattacks this night against 1/6 seriously weakened the Japanese.

The active offensives of the elements of 2/2 ended on D+3. Thereafter, 2/2 carried out mopping-up activities.

#### D+4 On

During the fourth day, 3/2, 1/8, and all 3 battalions of the 6th Marines swept to the end of the island against weak resistance. About 475 more

Japanese were killed, with light U.S. casualties. The next several days were used to root out die-hard elements that had been bypassed.

#### AFTER-ACTION SUMMARY

##### Objectives

On D-Day, 2/2 (-) established a precarious beachhead, but was unable to reach the O-1 objective line. About 4 platoons aided 3/2, which similarly was far short of the O-1 line.

On D+1, 2/2 (-) reached its O-3 objective as ordered and consolidated its defense there. The other 4 platoons fought with 3/2 and reached its O-2 line at the GREEN Beach, but did not reach the O-2 line flanking 2/2.

On D+2, 1/2 plus 2 Cos. of 2/2 made limited gains, expanding the south shore beachhead. Its objective was to push east and link up with 2/8, which it was unable to do.

On D+3, 1/2 plus 2 companies of 2/2 fought a holding engagement, as fresh troops attacked east in the main effort and linked up with them.

##### Obstacles

Elements of 2/2 had to gain the beach almost defenseless in the water against heavy, accurate fires. The assault elements did not receive the bulk of their reserve support. On land, elements fought under two commanders in piecemeal attacks based on ad hoc orders. Enemy fires could not be effectively suppressed for two days because of the enemy's ability to use strongly fortified positions. Confused debarkation contributed to delays in reorganizing and in coordinating the advance. Communications were not effective on D-Day.

Casualties

2/2 suffered heavy casualties on D-Day and D+1, perhaps four times those of their opponents. On D+2 and D+3, casualties were moderate, while enemy casualties were heavy.

Results

The aim of seizing Betio fast, without diversionary attacks, succeeded, but with far higher casualties and the use of more reserves than anticipated.

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**ENGAGEMENT 28. BATTALION AMPHIBIOUS LANDING AND FOLLOW-UP OPERATION, 3RD BN, 1ST MARINES, 1ST MARINE DIVISION, INCHON & SEOUL, KOREA, SEPTEMBER 15-18 AND SEPTEMBER 25, 1950**

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**INTRODUCTION**

This engagement describes the operations of the 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines, 1st Marine Division in amphibious assault at Inchon, Korea, follow-up to secure beachhead objectives, and beginning of the battle to capture Seoul.

The sections of this engagement report and their subject matter are:

• **General Preparation for the Engagement**

This summarizes the strategy, staffing, and planning for the Inchon operation, intelligence of enemy and terrain, the missions assigned by X Corps and by 1st Marine Division, and planned supporting fires for the amphibious assault.

• **Unit History**

This summarizes the organizing of the division and of 3/1 from onset of the Korean war.

• **Pre-Engagement Operations**

This summarizes the assembling of the amphibious force and movement to the assault area.

• **The Engagement**

This describes chronologically the operations of 3/1 and of adjacent and supporting units of the Division from D-Day through D+3 and on D+10/11.

• **After-Action Summary**

This briefly states the accomplishment of the 3/1 missions and the character of the enemy opposing it.

### GENERAL PREPARATION FOR THE ENGAGEMENT

Planning for Inchon was conducted with unusual haste, and under conditions of disagreement over the strategy, especially the choice of Inchon for the landing. The site was considered highly risky by senior naval and Marine personnel, for hydrographic reasons, and because some so-called beaches were virtually wharves, while others were fronted by seawalls. The tides were difficult, and the beach gradients tricky. Except for a few days, and on those days for only about 90 minutes, mud flats of undetermined solidity would have to be crossed. A series of conferences were held in an effort to persuade General MacArthur to land further south. On August 23, in a final meeting, he held firm. He based his decision on the potentially decisive result for the whole war, and the need for established port facilities for the rapid logistic support needed for the X Corps advance inland to cut across Korea.

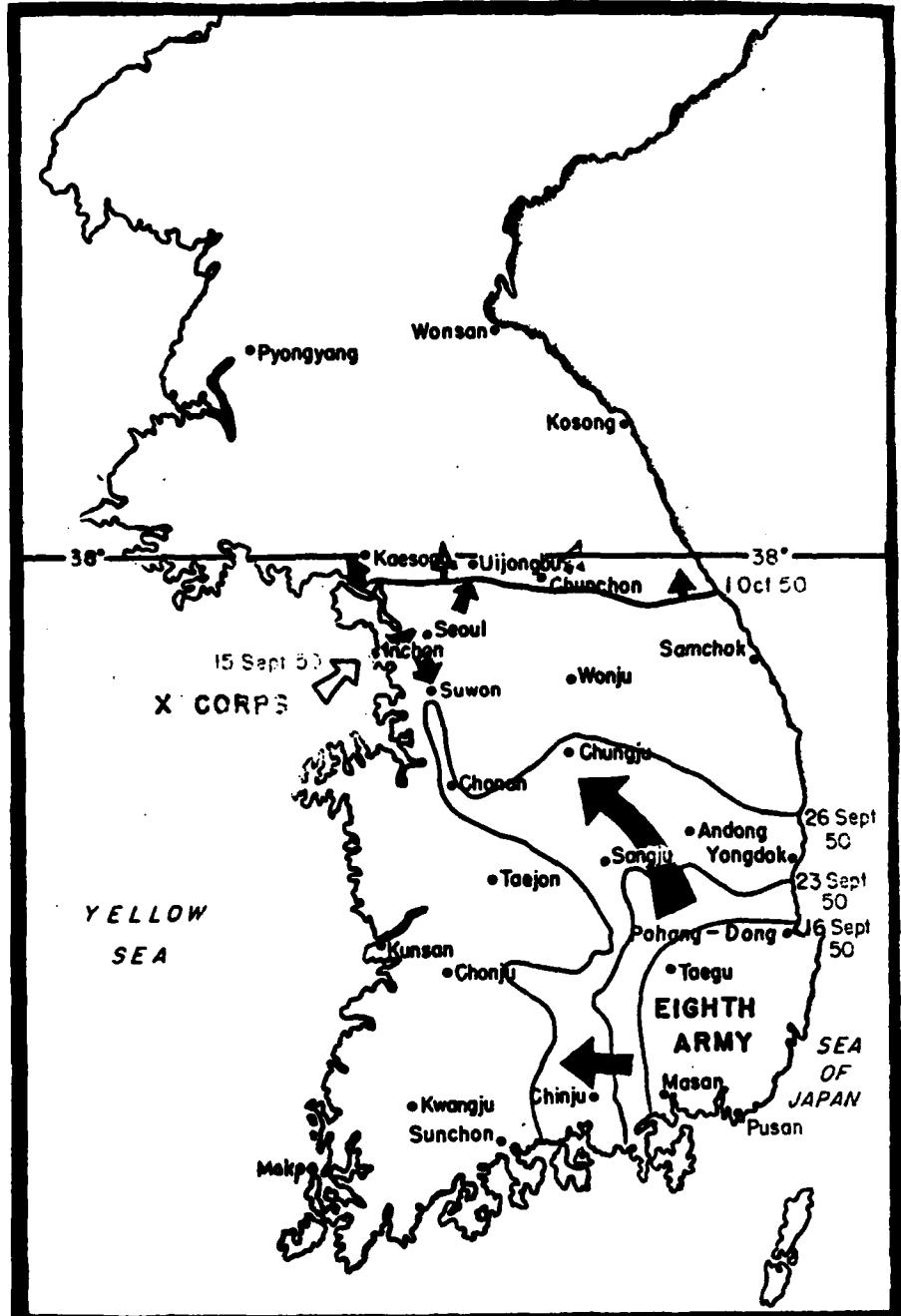
Planning had to rush forward for the September 15 D-Day. At the same time, staffs were being organized and strengthened, for neither Division, Corps, nor the Fleet Amphibious Force staffs had existed 30 days before the landing.

Planning was done concurrently in Tokyo and aboard the Mount McKinley, Command ship of the landing. The operation was to be commanded by Commander Amphibious Group One, under CINCFE direction. The plan envisaged the assault and capture of the Inchon beachhead by 1st Marine Division (Reinf), and exploitation by 7th Army Infantry Division, supported by troops of the newly formed X Corps.

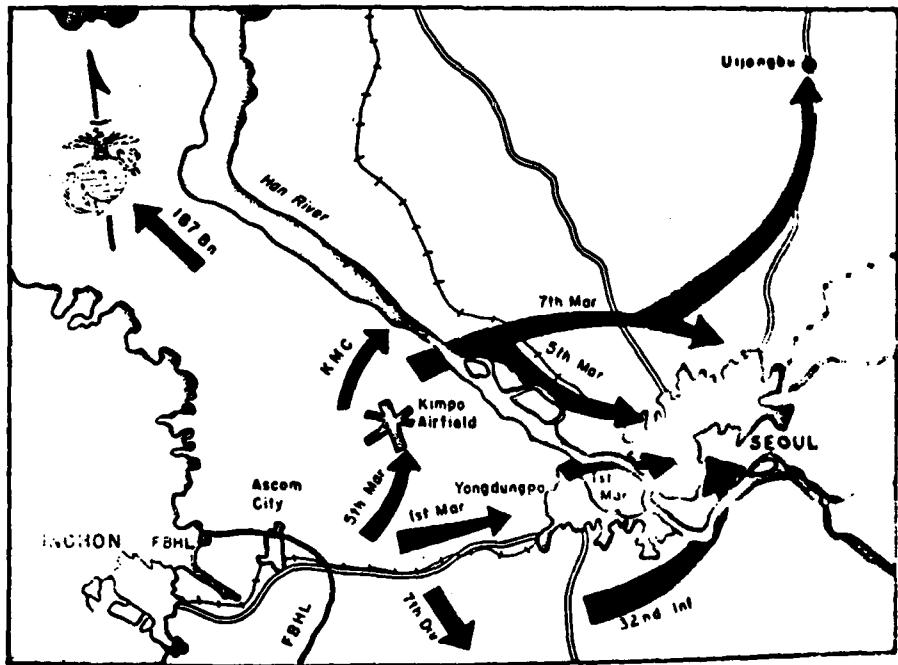
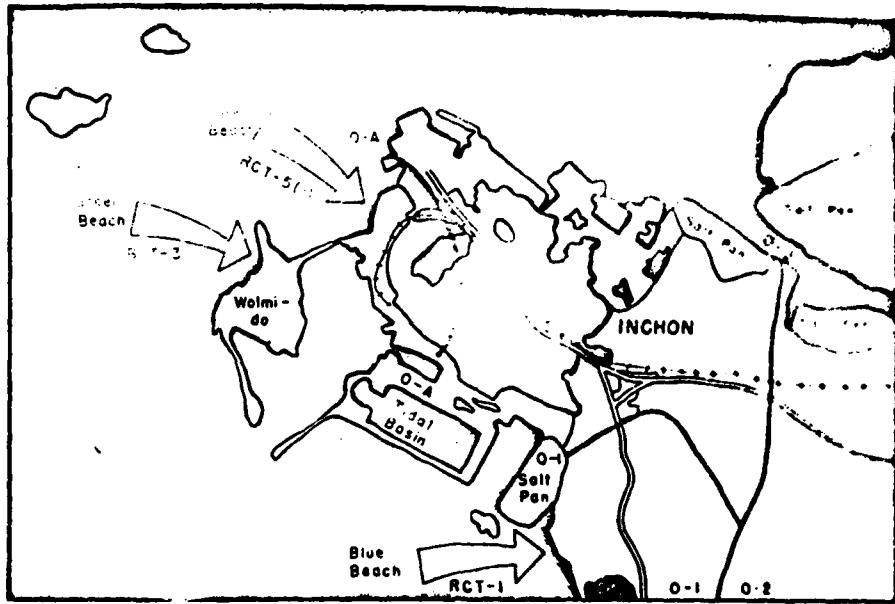
### Missions and Scheme of Maneuver

The pre-Inchon situation is sketched in Map 1. Devised by a combined Army-Marine staff destined to become the X Corps staff, the mission and scheme of maneuver were

- 1st Marine Division to seize the urban area of Inchon and BLUE BEACH, advance rapidly to seize Kimpo Airfield (see Map 2), clear out the south



MAP 1



MAP 2

bank of the Han River, cross it and seize Seoul; secure the high ground to the north; and fortify and hold this line with reduced forces until relieved (by 3rd Army Infantry Division); then seize a line 25 miles southeast of Seoul.

- 7th Army Infantry Division to follow ashore, turn south, and ultimately form with 1st Marine Division a line to trap the North Korean forces expected to flee north from Pusan.
- 1st Marine Aircraft Wing to furnish air support for the Corps, first entirely afloat, then using Kimpo Airfield.

In order to establish the beachhead on the mainland (landing in the late afternoon), the island of Wolmi-do off Inchon would first have to be captured D-Day morning. (This operation is summarized below, but is not a part of the present engagement.)

#### THE LAND AND THE ENEMY

Photographs showed the Inchon area to be honey-combed with defensive installations, but there was great uncertainty about the size of the defending force. Little was known of North Korean defensive tactics; they had so far been only on the offensive. The final pre-landing estimate of enemy strength was 1,500 to 2,500 NKPA troops in the Inchon area, which were largely newly mobilized. (It did prove feasible, however, for North Korea to reinforce Seoul, which already had a moderate-sized garrison, before the Marine attack on the city began.) However, an Eighth Army offensive was launched at the time of Inchon to pin these troops down, and this prevented a large-scale reinforcement. North Korean troops in Seoul reached a strength of 10,000 by the time of the Battle for Seoul.

The main concern of the amphibious phase was the terrain. Wolmi-do Island blocked the main harbor, was attached to it by a causeway, and itself was dominated by a series of hills. It had to be taken before

landing on the mainland could be risked. L-hour for Wolmi-do was set for early morning. Inchon was a highly developed port and industrial town, which could easily swallow up a regiment in its intricate street pattern, once the regiment (the 5th) surmounted the seawalls. Therefore, the 1st Marines were to land to the south, a scheme designed to draw off forces which might block movement of the 5th through Seoul. The sector of 1st Marine Division (BLUE BEACH) lay just south of the town. Except when the tide exceeded 25 feet, it could be approached only over mudflats, and like the port, contained rocky seawalls. Thus, planking to traverse stretches of the mudflat and scaling ladders to climb the seawalls had to be carried in most landing craft. All these considerations caused H-Hour for the mainland beaches to be set at 1730, for highest tide, with initial missions after landing to be achieved before dark.

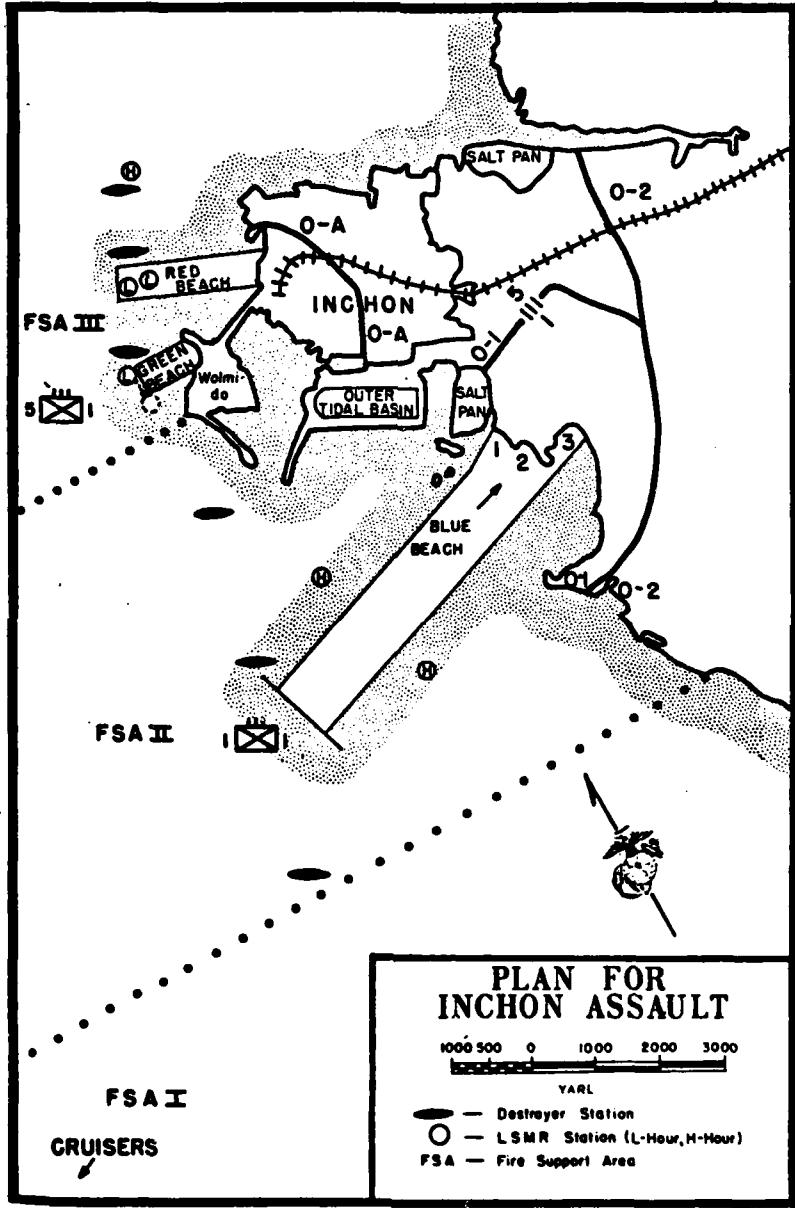
#### DIVISION LANDING-FORCE MISSIONS ON MAINLAND

BLT-3 of RCT-5 would land on RED BEACH at H-Hour, seize Objective 0-A (Map 3), move through Inchon, effect a juncture with RCT 1, and prepare to advance to the Force Beachhead Line (FBHL). RCT 1 would land on BLUE BEACH (2/1 on BLUE 1, 3/1 on BLUE 2), seize Objective 0-1, and prepare to attack east with RCT 5(-) to seize the Force Beachhead Line (FBHL).

Two battalions of the 11th Marines would land on Wolmi-do Island at H-hour, and support the mainland beachhead seizure with priority fires to RCT-1 (BLUE BEACH). (This plan was later abandoned in favor of landing all artillery over the RED BEACH.)

#### Planned Supporting Fires

Cruiser and destroyer preparatory fires would take place on D-2, and be repeated on D-1 if necessary. On D-Day our cruisers would fire from 13,000 to 15,000 yards off the northern area (Fire Support Area One),



MAP 3

while the destroyers would engage the beaches from positions 800 to 6,000 yards offshore. Rocket ships (LSMR's) would pass across the front of the landing forces, hitting in turn GREEN, RED, BLUE BEACHES. From H-180 to H-5 minutes, cruisers and destroyers would deliver 2875 shells. From H-25 to H-5, the LSMR's would hit the RED and BLUE BEACHES with 3,000 rockets per vessel.

At H-5 naval fires would cease, and Marine and Naval aircraft would strafe and bomb the beaches. This air support was under X Corps command, while air superiority and interdiction fires, to be delivered earlier, were to be by Joint Task Force carrier-based naval air.

#### UNIT HISTORY

1st Marine Division was commanded during the Korean War by Major General Oliver P. Smith. As soon as the Korean War started, the division was reduced from a strength of 7789 to 3386, as it supplied the main cadre for the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade which was rushed into combat above the Pusan perimeter. Most of the 1st Marine Air Wing which normally supported the 1st Marine Division was similarly cadred to provide the air component of the Brigade. When the war started, General MacArthur requested a war-strength Marine division, and its expansion began immediately. Elements of the 1st MAR DIV together with 1st MAW, had had recent training exercises, and it was selected. First Marines were brought to full strength at Camp Pendleton. General MacArthur set September 10 as his deadline for the division to be ready for immediate combat, already having Inchon in mind. The first reservists reached Camp Pendleton July 31.

The Provisional Brigade, including two reduced strength battalions of the 5th Marines, landed in Korea on August 2, just in time to help establish the Pusan perimeter. Here the 5th Marines were gradually filled out with reserves from Camp Pendleton. Next, the 7th Marines were activated at Camp Pendleton August 10, and built up, drawing units from Camp Lejeune

and the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean. Three results of the problems of current planning, training, and fighting were: the division staff was never integrated until they reached Inchon; the 5th Marines were pulled out of Pusan for Inchon, and the 7th (still being organized in the Mediterranean) was therefore dropped from the assault landing phase, and the 1st Marines moved directly from the United States onto the beaches (with a 4-day stopover in Japan for reloading).

The 1st Marines were brought to war strength at Camp Pendleton over a few weeks, absorbing individuals and small units, regular and reserve, from all over the United States. It had only sketchy training above the company level, and had never rehearsed either an amphibious landing or a regiment-sized combat action. When it reloaded at Kobe, its tactical plans, prepared by the X Corps and Division staffs, had still not been received. When the 1st Marines moved from ships toward shore, they still lacked many details about the terrain. These problems were not oversights, but simply resulted from the urgency to meet General MacArthur's D-Day for Inchon only 2-1/2 months after the war started. Many individuals in the 1st Marines did, of course, have experience. The commander was Colonel Lewis B. Puller. The CO, 3rd battalion, was Lieut. Colonel Thomas L. Ridge, who had served a few months with the unit before it entered combat.

#### PRE-ENGAGEMENT OPERATIONS

The all-out North Korean attack on the Pusan perimeter at the beginning of September almost prevented use of the 5th Marines at Inchon. Ready to embark, they had to be recommitted to combat. Finally, a regiment of the 7th Army Infantry Division, destined for INCHON follow-up operations, was sent to Pusan as floating reserve; this permitted pulling out the 5th Marines on September 6, when they embarked for the September 15 landing.

Elements of the 1st Marine Division sailed from Tokyo (this was the 1st Marines, coming from San Diego), from Kobe, and from Pusan. These

forces joined up afloat off the southern tip of Korea, and one day before landing reached a peninsula just south of the bay leading to Inchon, after weathering a severe typhoon. Air bombardment of the mainland beaches began September 12. On September 13, six destroyers shelled the mainland in daylight in order to discover the defensive gun positions. At the cost of a few hits on the destroyers, they and the cruisers discovered and destroyed most of the Inchon gun positions.

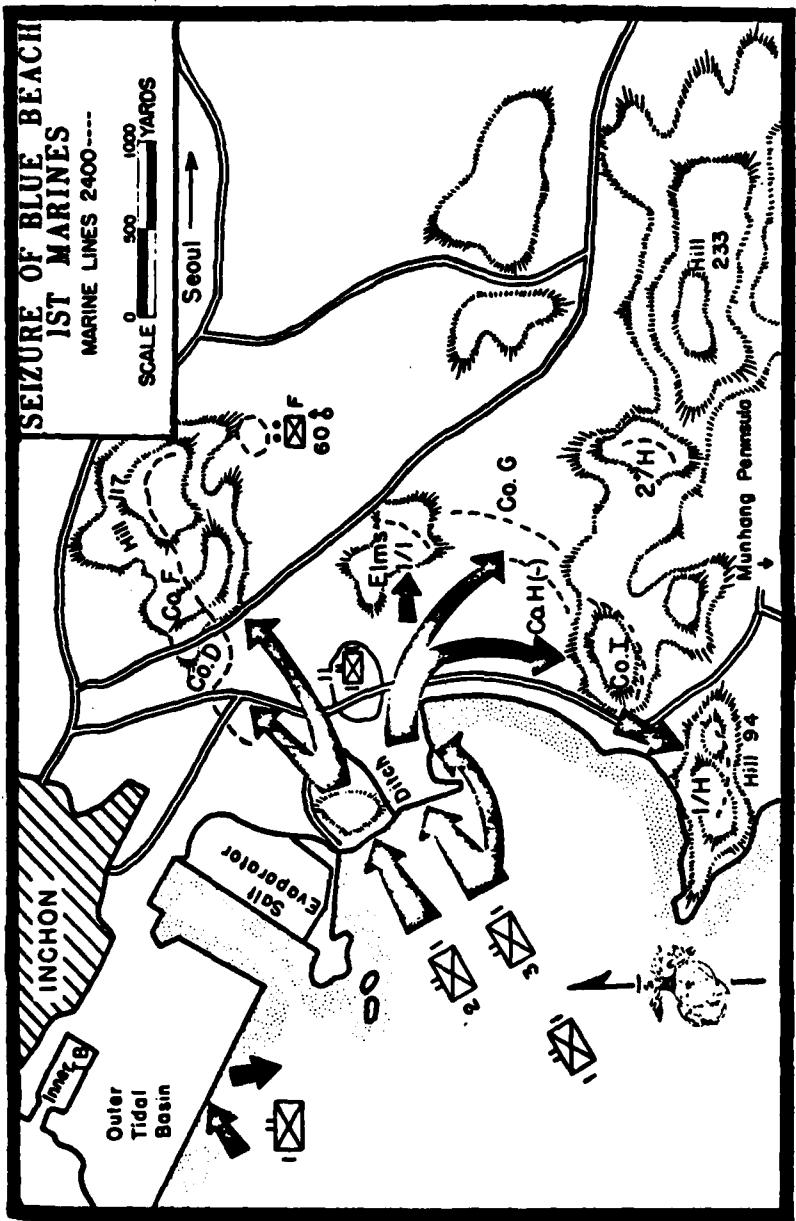
Before dawn D-Day, the entire Advance Attack Group navigated the difficult waters west of Wolmi-do Island. 3/5 landed about 0630, and by noon the main fight on the island was over.

#### THE ENGAGEMENT

The features of the mainland assault area are shown in Map 3. 5th Marines, less 3rd battalion, would assault the RED BEACH, scale the seawalls, move through the town, and link up with 1st Marines at the O-1 line behind the "Salt Pan."

1st Marines, three miles to the south, would assault BLUE BEACHES 1 and 2, then seize BLUE 3 to discover whether it was also usable as a beach. BLUE 1 was 500 yards wide, flanked on the left by a rock revetment. A drainage ditch, the nature of which was vague, was the right boundary of BLUE 1. Just beyond lay a dirt road leading inland, and 2/1 expected its amphibious tractors to move onto this beach and inland. BLUE BEACH 2 was also 500 yards wide, fronted by a rock sea wall.

Landing abreast, 2/1 and 3/1 (the unit of this study) were initially to seize the O-1, then the O-2 line on the right. 3/1 was also to seize the tip of HILL 233 and the cape on the right topped by HILL 94 (see Map 4).



MAP 4

No more will be said of the 5th RCT (-) operation than that it landed on schedule, and by 2400 had encircled Cemetery Hill and Observatory Hill but had not reached the Inner Tidal Basin.

By H-Hour, rain squalls and smoke had completely obscured the BLUE BEACH from seaward. Meanwhile, last minute photography showed that BLUE BEACH 3 might be accessible and that the drainage ditch might not. Lt. Col. Thomas L. Ridge, CO 3/1, therefore decided to visit BLUE 3 and, if assailable in LVT's, to direct later waves to BLUE 3.

The Line of Departure was 5,500 yards offshore, requiring a 45-minute trip in LVT's. Some disorientation set in as to the location of the BLUE BEACH. First, mortar fire landed around the Control Vessel. There were no compasses or radios in the amphibian tractors. Moreover, the Army crews of the leading LVT (A)'s had never practiced an amphibious landing. They were guided shoreward by Navy guide boats. Wave 2 was close enough to see and follow them, but beginning with Wave 3, disorientation set in. Subsequent waves headed for the smoke. Wave 5 of 3/1 cut across 2/1 and asked their identification and the direction to the beach.

The first two waves of 2/1 made their land-fall successfully, carrying the two assault companies ashore. The third wave bogged down in mud 300 yards off shore. Ashore, few landmarks proved familiar, so companies groped their way inland.

The nine LVT (A)'s of 3/1 hit BLUE BEACH 2 just after H-hour. They decided to avoid the muck of the drainage ditch. While they engaged light forces from just offshore, the second wave, ten minutes late, hit the seawall with the lead elements of Cos. G and I (left to right). The third wave landed intermingled with the second wave. The CO led the way up the ramp of BLUE 2, sending his Exec., Major Reginald R. Myers, around the flank to BLUE 3. Co. G on the left moved in tractor column up the drainage ditch. Co. I scaled the seawall on ladders

and engineer nets in the face of moderate small arms fire. Co. G then dismounted from tractors, reorganized, and drove inland to seize the secondary road between the two hills to the front (Map 4). At this time, the tractors assaulting the ramp to the right of BLUE BEACHES 2 and 3 crawled ashore. BLUE BEACH 3 proved a boon in getting the troops ashore fast. Once ashore, the intermingled waves and platoons were sorted out. Cos. G and I cleared the beach area quickly. (The reserve battalion 2/2, suffered the worst orientation, and many units landed on BLUE 1 instead of BLUE 2.)

#### Seizing the O-1 Line

2/2 reached the road intersection, its Objective A, at 2000, and HILL 117 almost astride the Inchon-Seoul Road at 2200.

I/3/2, advancing against light resistance, seized the western nose of HILL 233 (Objective C) at 1900, and by 2030 Co. G had blocked the Inchon-Seoul road and corridor north of HILL 233, the center of the O-1 line. At 2030, Co. H engaged a company of North Koreans on Objective B (the cape and HILL 94). The enemy quickly abandoned their entrenchments, leaving 30 dead and wounded. A platoon of Co. H covered the low ground between Cos. G and I. Meanwhile 2d Platoon, Co. H passed through Co. I, intending to set up an OP on HILL 233, 2000 yards to the east. Halfway there, it established an OP on the lower HILL 180 instead, and was given permission to halt for the night. In an unprecedented operation, eight LST's landed at or after dusk on the RED BEACH, and unloaded through the night. Almost no supplies were landed on BLUE BEACH, as RED BEACH would become the supply source for all units.

The artillery of both regiments landed on the RED BEACH. They were not ready to fire until 2150, but their fires were not needed even then because of light resistance. For follow-up operations, 2/11 was assigned to fire in direct support of the 1st Marines, but no artillery was landed over the BLUE BEACH because of the mud flats.

D+1

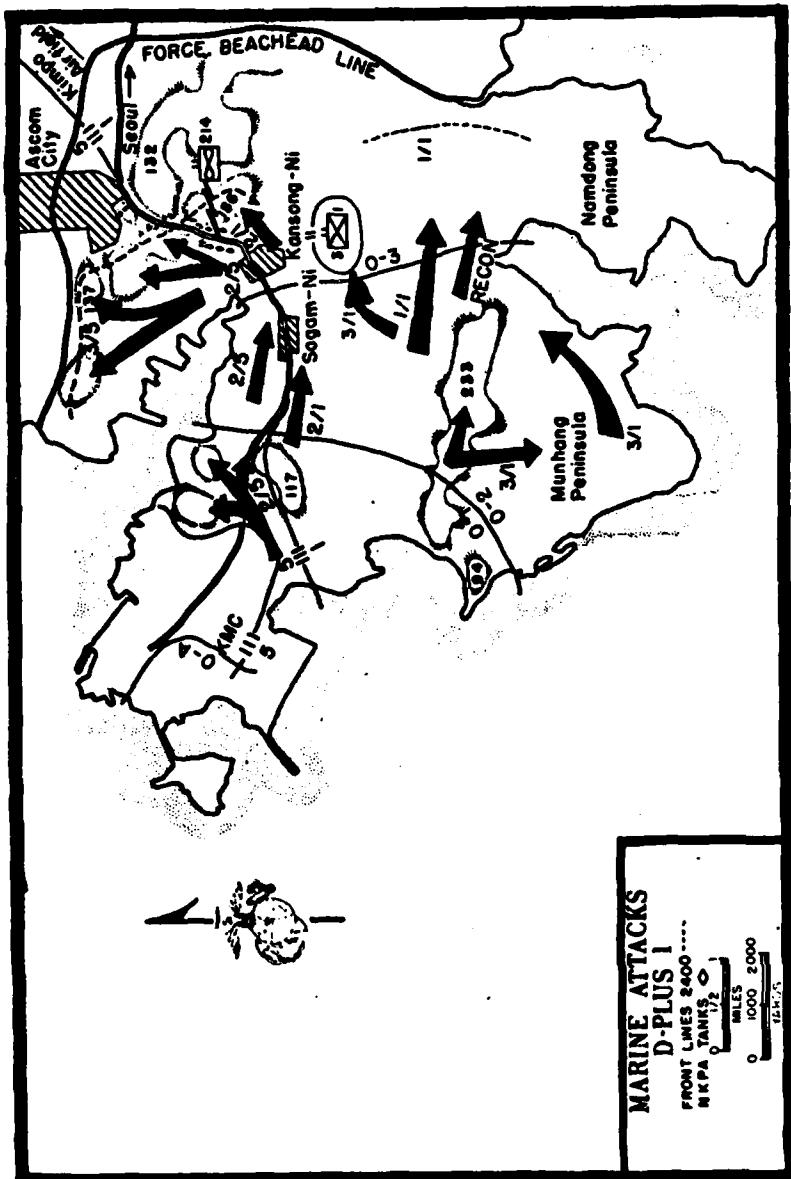
The plan was for 5th Marines to move through the town, then 3 miles on to come abreast of 1st Marines on the O-2 line which the 1st had already reached. Then both regiments would drive east and seize the O-3 line. By this time, North Korean communications in the area of the beaches and west of Seoul had been completely disrupted. Thus, as some North Korean troops abandoned Inchon, other isolated detachments inadequately supported were sent forward from Seoul piecemeal with little knowledge of the U.S. positions.

The two Marine regiments linked up before 0700 at HILL 117 (Map 5). While 2/1 drove east and 1/1 became regimental reserve, 3/1 turned south from HILL 233 to sweep the Munhang Peninsula. Resistance was light. Many North Koreans were available to defend the peninsula, but surrendered with little fight. The enemy lost a battery of 120mm mortars, 4 coastal guns, and a large quantity of rifles and machine guns. By now, the Division CG realized that there was no significant enemy resistance out to the O-3 line.

Beyond, the next objective line was the Force Beachhead Line. 1st Marines attacked east with the Inchon-Seoul road as the left boundary. Most of the fighting the rest of the day was in the 5th Marines' sector, mainly against companies of T-34 tanks. 3/1 completed clearing the Munhang Peninsula of disorganized North Korean troops. Then, as 1st Marines halted for the night two miles beyond the O-3 line, 3/1 was sent into a gap just south of Kansong-ni, where it formed a perimeter for night defense about 1800. The Division CG landed at 1730, and his CP was set up southeast of Inchon. By now an MSR was supporting troops from all beaches.

D+2

On this morning, elements of 2/5 and 1/1 laid an ambush at a bend in the Inchon-Seoul road southwest of ASCOM City. They annihilated a column



## **MAP 5**

of six T-34 tanks sent from Seoul, in a situation evidencing that the NK command in Seoul had no precise information on the location of the 1st Marine Division.

The 5th and 1st Marines jumped off in a combined attack to seize the X Corps Phase Line CC, including the major objective of Kimpo Airfield. The main effort was made by the 5th. The North Koreans put up a strong but confused defense. The first counterattack was made by elements of an Air Force Division fighting with neither guidance nor reinforcements from the Army command in Seoul. On D+3, after a spirited but disorganized NK counterattack failed, Kimpo Airfield fell at 1000, as did the high ground to the northeast overlooking the Han River a half-hour later.

Meanwhile, on D+2, a North Korean attack toward HILL 186 was repelled by 2/1. They stubbornly held HILL 208 to the east (Map 6). 2/1 slowly advanced against this hill, west of Sosa, against the first really stubborn resistance met.

3/1 now attacked through a defile southeast of Mahang-ri (Map 6). Here Co. G was hit by a heavy volume of small-arms, antitank, and mortar fire. The company was thrown back by the intensity of this fire. With close air support, Co. G drove the enemy off the pass ahead in a severe engagement, the issue of which was for a time in doubt. In the day's encounter, 1st Marines gained 4800 yards. They suffered light casualties (1 KIA, 34 WIA) while killing 250, capturing 70, and destroying several tanks and anti-tank guns.

#### D+3

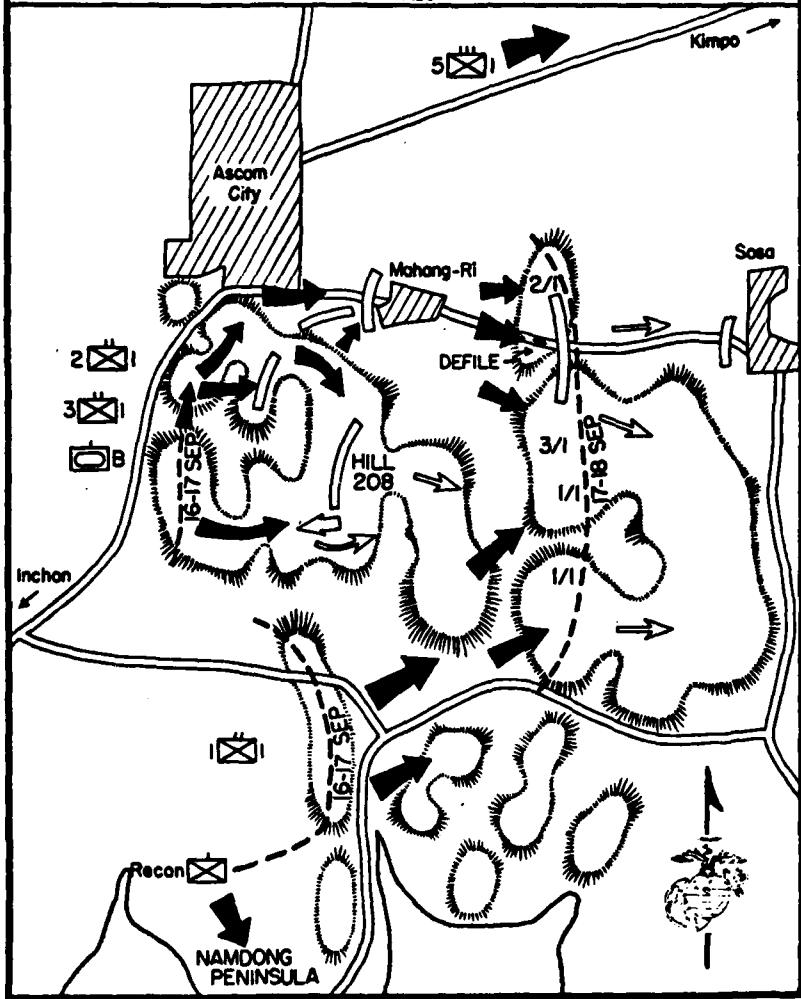
3/1 passed through 2/1 and in LVT's, DUKWS, and jeeps captured Sosa against light opposition at noon. On the right, 1/1 gained 1000 yards. A major build-up of NK forces west of Seoul began to be detected, including forces threatening Kimpo, the west bank of the Han opposite Seoul, the Haengju area north of the Han, and the Division right flank. This would be the first major enemy counterattack.

## ADVANCE BY 1st MARINES - 17 SEP

MARINE  
ATTACKS →  
FRONT LINES - - -

NKPA  
POSITIONS ↗  
FLIGHT →

0 5000  
YARDS



MAP 6

At 1415 a heavy mortar barrage hit 3/1 on HILL 123 (Map 7). Mortar fire also hit 2/1 to the south.

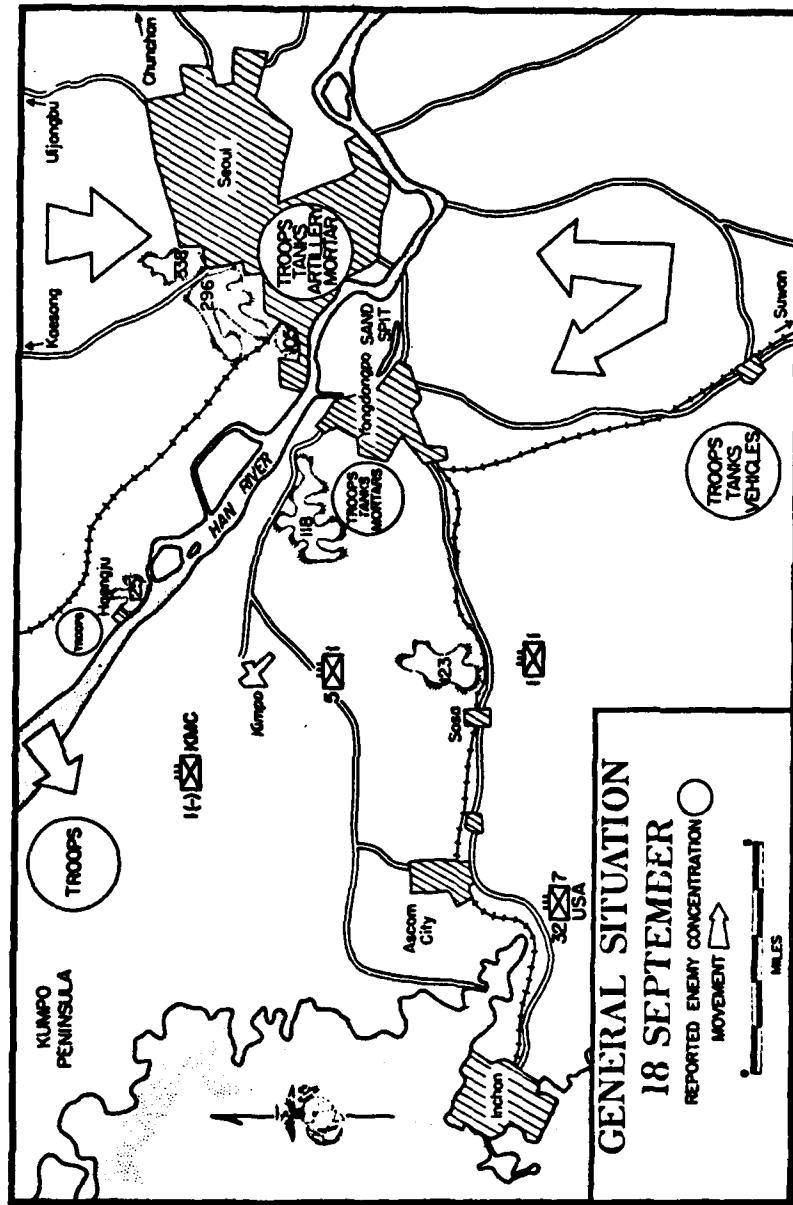
September 25 (D+10)

The next phase (D+4 to D+9) of 1st Marine operations, the Battle of Yongdungpo and crossing of tributaries of the Han River bordering Seoul, is described in Engagement 11, and is therefore omitted here. This present engagement study skips forward to describe 3/1 action in the attack on Seoul, after it crossed the Han River.

By now, the Division was engaging the main line of resistance of the North Koreans, and the fighting had become much more intensive. On September 25 (D+10) the final stage of the battle for Seoul began, after the 1st Marines crossed the Han the previous day just south of Haeju. The Division was disposed with 1st Marines on the right, 5th Marines in the center, and 7th Marines, newly arrived from the Mediterranean, on the left. The 32d Infantry, 7th Army Infantry Division was on the right of the 1st Marines, and to its right the 17th ROK Infantry (see Map 8). But the 1st and 5th Marines would play the main role in capturing Seoul. Approximately 10,000 NKPA troops opposed the 1st Marine Division in highly developed positions.

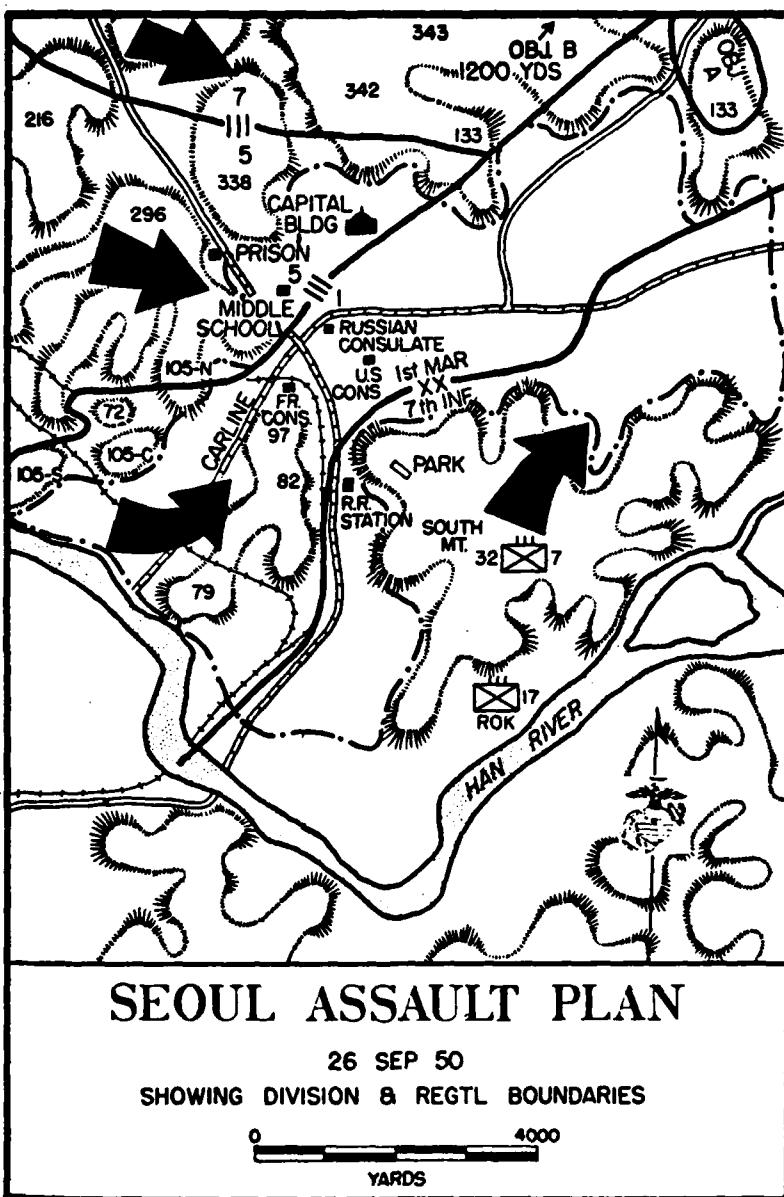
Mission

1st Marines, with the 2d Korean Marine Battalion (2 KMC) attached, was to seize the part of Seoul within its Zone of Action and Objective ABLE (HILL 133) (Map 8), high ground about 6 miles from jump-off positions. 5th Marines would seize Objective B. The 7th Marines would protect the Division left flank. 3/1 moved forward to jump-off position before daybreak in a column of companies. It passed through 2/1, between HILLS 105S, 105C, and 79, then pivoted around HILL 79. The 1st Marines thus swung 90 degrees, to attack north into the heart of Seoul. At this time a task force of tanks and engineers ran into a strong force in caves in supposedly captured HILL 105S, killing 150 and capturing 131.



MAP 7

A-100



MAP 8

A-101

By 1200, 3/1, strongly supported by M-26 tanks, was fighting its way up the boulevard and carline and railroad tracks heading for the French and Russian consulates, against mines and heavy NKPA fire. By evening 3/1 had advanced 2000 yards and occupied positions astride the carline at HILL 97 and had tied in with 1/1 on its right on HILL 82.

The X Corps Commander ordered an immediate night attack. This was done on grounds that the North Korean troops were fleeing Seoul; General Smith was skeptical in view of the forces facing him. The attack was about to jump off at 0200, when a flash message from CO 3/1 reported a heavy enemy attack, supported by tanks and self-propelled guns moving down the main avenue into the 1st Marines' Zone of Action. This was discovered at 0130 by a patrol of 3/1 seeking contact with a patrol of 5th Marines. Two enemy tanks appeared. One was destroyed, one driven back by G/3/1 with machine guns, 3.5-inch rockets, and 75mm recoilless rifles. The Division attack was postponed, as the enemy force was believed to be a battalion plus 12 tanks.

By 0230, a heavy concentration of high-angle Marine howitzer fire of 3 battalions, together with 81mm mortar fire, had virtually destroyed the attacking column, and subsequent enemy infantry action was negligible. The howitzer fires finally had to cease to save the tubes. Enemy T-34's continued to attack until 0630. The enemy casualties were determined to be 7 tanks, 2 self-propelled guns, 475 to 500 KIA from the 25th Brigade, many more wounded, and 83 prisoners. 3/1 casualties were light. Other counterattacks of equal intensity occurred to the south of 1st Marines.

On September 26, 2/1 passed through 3/1 to carry out the remaining streetfighting down the boulevard. At this point, the engagement ends.

#### AFTER-ACTION SUMMARY

On D-Day, 3/1 effected a successful, though confused, landing after an uncertain ship-to-shore movement, in which confusion at the beachhead

was not exploited by the enemy because the defending forces were light and inexperienced. 3/1 rapidly reorganized at the beach, seized one of its initial hill objectives on schedule, and got to within 1000 yards of its second objective (HILL 233) by 2030. On D+1, 3/1 captured HILL 233 early, and by evening had cleared about half the Munhang Peninsula of enemy forces. It had secured its sector of the O-1 and O-2 lines. On D+1, 3/1 completed clearing the Munhang Peninsula. When the Division was at many points 2 miles beyond the O-3 line, 3/1 assumed a part of the perimeter defense for the night. On D+2, 3/1 met the first heavy resistance and advanced slowly toward Sosa, east of the Force Beachhead Line. On D+3, 3/1 met heavy resistance after helping to capture Sosa.

In the Battle for Seoul, 3/1 advanced into the city in heavy fighting by day; then at night was struck by a surprise battalion-sized tank-supported counterattack, sufficient to forestall a planned division night attack. 3/1 crushed the counterattack with the help of a strong artillery barrage. 3/1 was actively engaged throughout. Enemy resistance was light and disorganized the first 2 days, but on D+3 and again on D+10/11 3/1 was engaged by strong, experienced troops.

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ENGAGEMENT 29. DEFENSE OF THE ENCIRCLED HAGARU, NORTH KOREA PERIMETER BY  
3RD BATTALION, 1ST MARINES, 1ST MARINE DIVISION, SUPPORTED  
BY MISCELLANEOUS SERVICE SUPPORT AND HEADQUARTERS TROOPS,  
NOVEMBER 26-DECEMBER 1, 1950

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This engagement describes the operations of the 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines, 1st Marine Division, in organizing and defending Hagaru in conditions of encirclement, and of isolation due to cuts in the Main Supply Route north and south of the town.

The sections of this engagement report and their subject matter are:

- General Situation Before the Engagement

This summarizes the Division and X Corps advance to Chosin Reservoir, the entry of Chinese forces and their first contacts in the X Corps zone, the tactics of the CCF, and the forces opposing X Corps a few days before this engagement.

- Pre-Engagement Operations

This summarizes the organization of 3/1 and its previous operations in Korea.

- Unit Background

This summarizes the Chinese offensive in the Chosin Reservoir area (at Yudam-ni and Toktong Pass), and the CCF maneuvers which made Hagaru's defense critical to successful withdrawal of the 1st Marine Division and other X Corps troops.

- The Engagement

This describes the organization and defense of Hagaru by 3/1 and other forces, from November 26 to December 1.

- After-Action Summary

This summarizes the 3/1 missions and performance, and casualties inflicted and suffered during the engagement.

## GENERAL SITUATION BEFORE THE ENGAGEMENT

### The Advance Toward the Yalu

After crossing the 38th parallel, 1st Marine Division advanced rapidly into North Korea against limited North Korean opposition. The Division, under X Corps, moved rapidly via Hungnam, Hamhung, and Hagaru, then initially to the east of Chosin Reservoir (Maps 1 and 2).

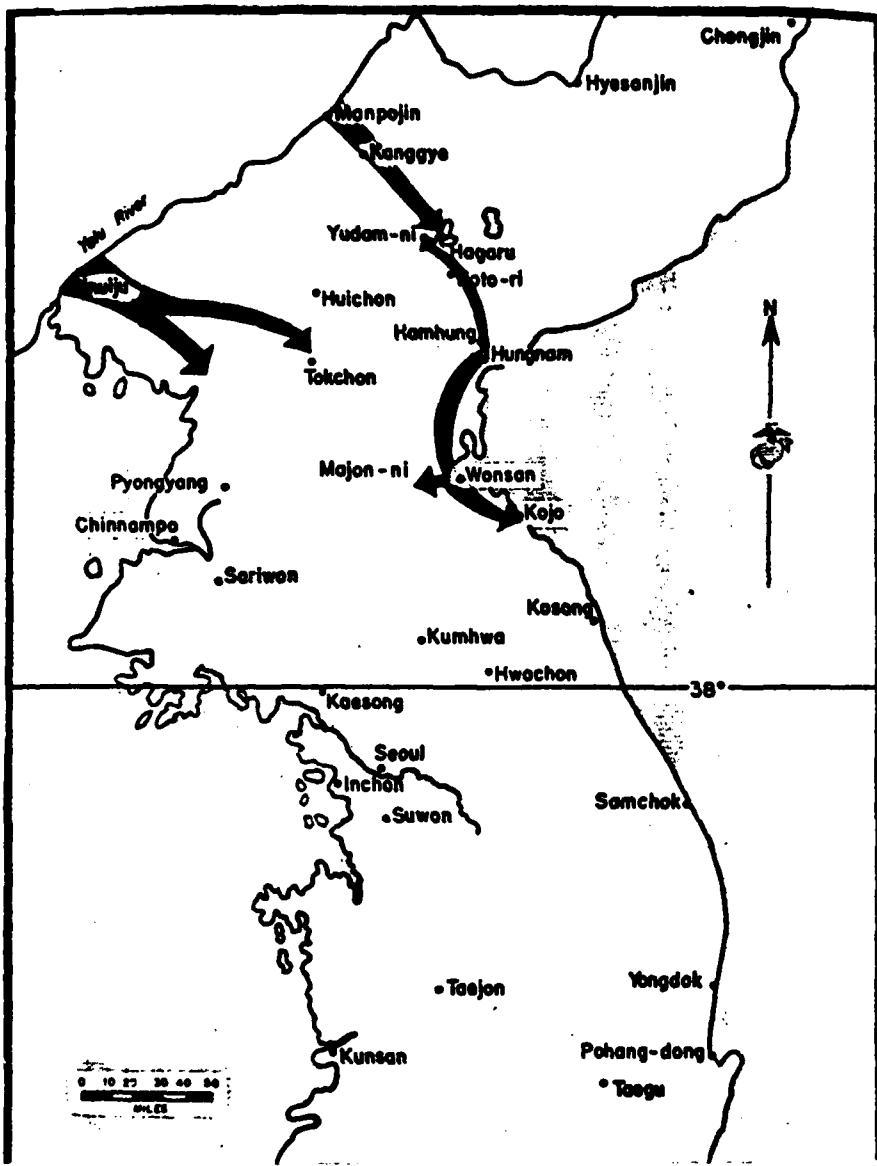
On November 25, the spread-out Division was directed in a new plan of GHQ and X Corps to attack from Yudam-ni, west of the Reservoir, to seize Mupyong-ni rather than continue the advance to the Yalu. Long before this, the CCF had become active in North Korea. They first struck above Pyongyang, badly mauling two Eighth Army Divisions. By October 16, CCF patrols were identified in Eastern North Korea. The 7th Marines met them first at Sudong, well south of the Reservoir. The CCF had encircled two of its battalions, but had been driven off in a hard fight. Thereafter, the CCF were for some time out of contact opposite X Corps, but they continued to apply pressure against Eighth Army. The reorientation of the Marine drive to attack toward Mupyong-ni was intended to cut the Chinese MSR and relieve this pressure.

5th Marines prepared to make the main effort, while 7th Marines protected the MSR north of Chinhung-ni, and the 1st Marines were to do the same farther south.

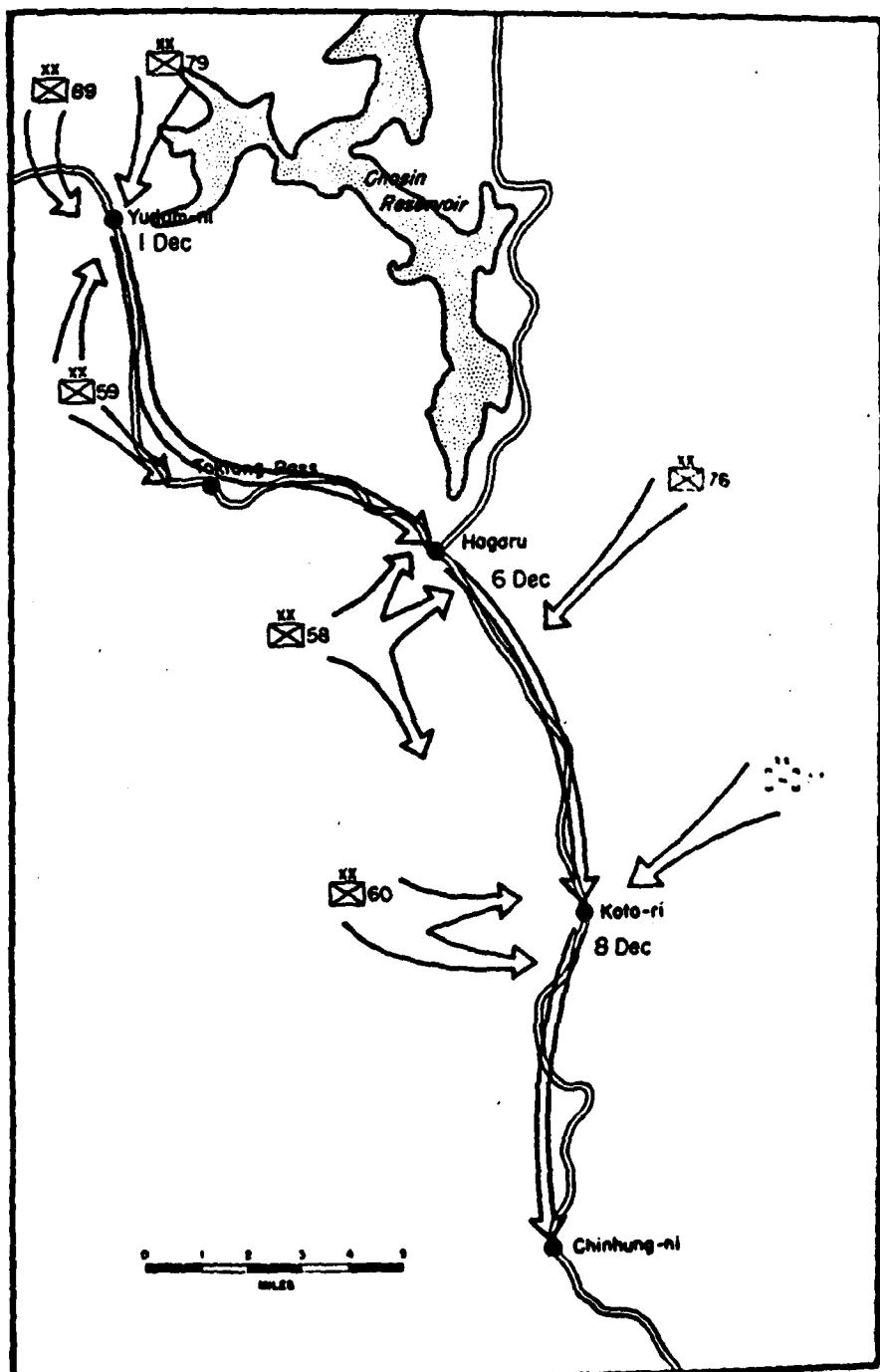
On the night of November 27, the CCF struck at Yudam-ni in a major offensive, which included efforts to envelop the force there, seize Hagaru, cut the MSR north and south of Hagaru, and destroy the Division.

### The Enemy

CCF tactics were unique. They almost always attacked at night. They used offensive-defensive tactics derived from guerrilla experience. In attacking, they used natural routes, then as soon as confronted deployed



MAP 1



MAP 2

A-107

into small combat groups. These advanced in rushes, taking cover whenever fired on until close enough to make an all-out assault. Then they attacked with rifles, machine guns, and grenades, not relinquishing the attack even when taking heavy casualties. They were generally more effective in making penetrations than in exploitation. After discovering and marking the front lines, small groups advanced independently; then larger units made the final attack from very close up on whistle and bugle command. The effect of multiple penetrations of platoon sectors could under some conditions disrupt an entire battalion. But tactics were entirely controlled from battalion level, and smaller units seldom took the initiative to deviate from an overall plan, especially in following up success.

Concentrated for the offensive facing X Corps were 9 divisions of the CCF 9th Army Group. (A division had between 7,000 and 8500 men.) Two of these divisions made the initial assault at Yudam-ni. Deployment of CCF Divisions at the time of this engagement is shown on Map 2.

#### Marine Preparations

Though still under Corps orders to advance beyond Yudam-ni, the Division made extensive preparations after November 15 to strengthen points along the MSR in event the CCF should attack in force.

#### UNIT BACKGROUND

The 1st Marines were brought to full strength at Camp Pendleton in August 1950. The regiment and 3/1 participated in the Inchon amphibious landing, the Battle of Seoul, and the capture of Uijongbu. It then made an administrative landing at Wonsan, and advanced up the MSR toward Chosin Reservoir. In this operation, 1st Marines were in the Division rear, securing the MSR and establishing bases behind the 5th and 7th Marines.

Lieut. Colonel Thomas L. Ridge, his Executive Major Reginald R. Myers, and all but one company commander served with the battalion throughout these operations. (The original CO of Co. G was wounded and evacuated on October 30.)

#### PRE-ENGAGEMENT OPERATIONS

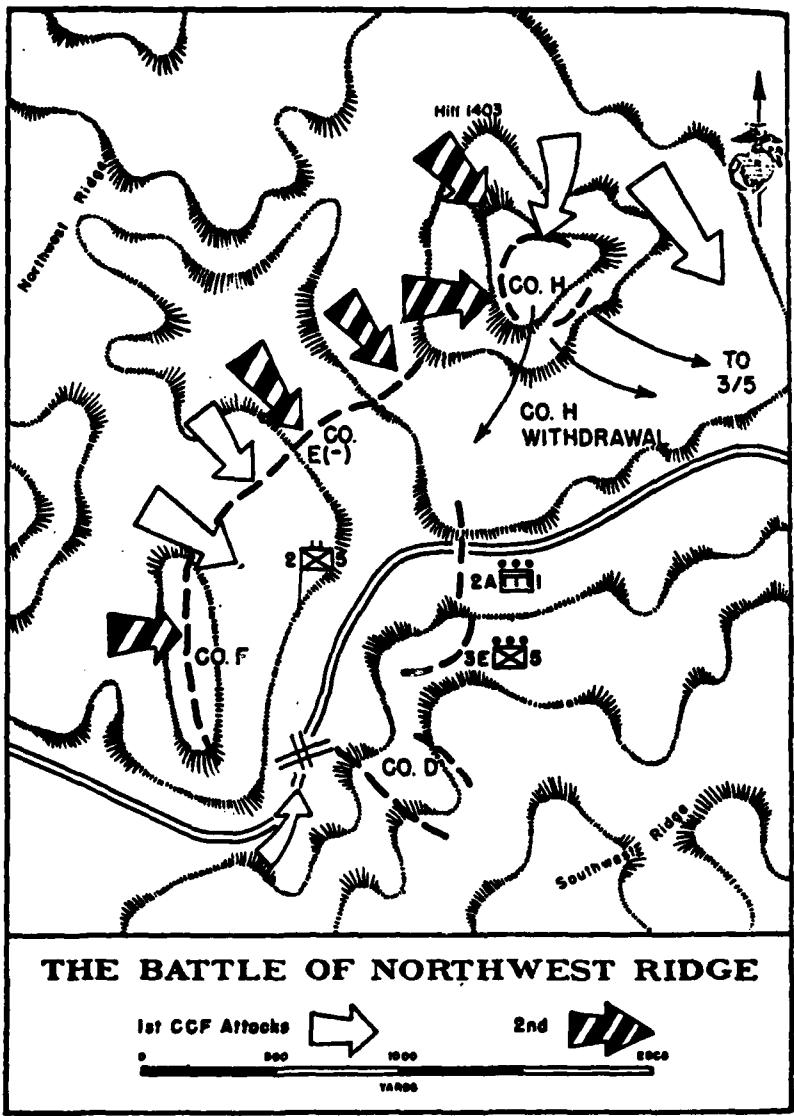
At Yudam-ni, after a heavy battle at NORTHWEST RIDGE (Map 3), the 5th Marines were almost cut off (November 27-28) but, together with elements of the 7th held their positions. Chinese forces struck from the northwest, enveloped the 5th Marines to the east, and engaged the 7th Marines in a bitter struggle for the hill positions around Toktong Pass, thus threatening to control the MSR all the way to Hagaru, even as relief convoys for Yudam-ni moved past the area toward the north. Other Chinese forces deployed below Hagaru both east and west of the MSR, threatening to interrupt or control it to Koto-ri and beyond (see Map 2).

#### THE ENGAGEMENT

By November 28, it was clear that Hagaru must be held at all costs if the bulk of the Division was to effect a withdrawal from Yudam-ni. Hagaru had an airstrip, hospital facilities, and the major supply dumps north of Hungnam. Yet it was held by only a reinforced infantry battalion less one rifle company, supported by two artillery batteries.

#### November 26

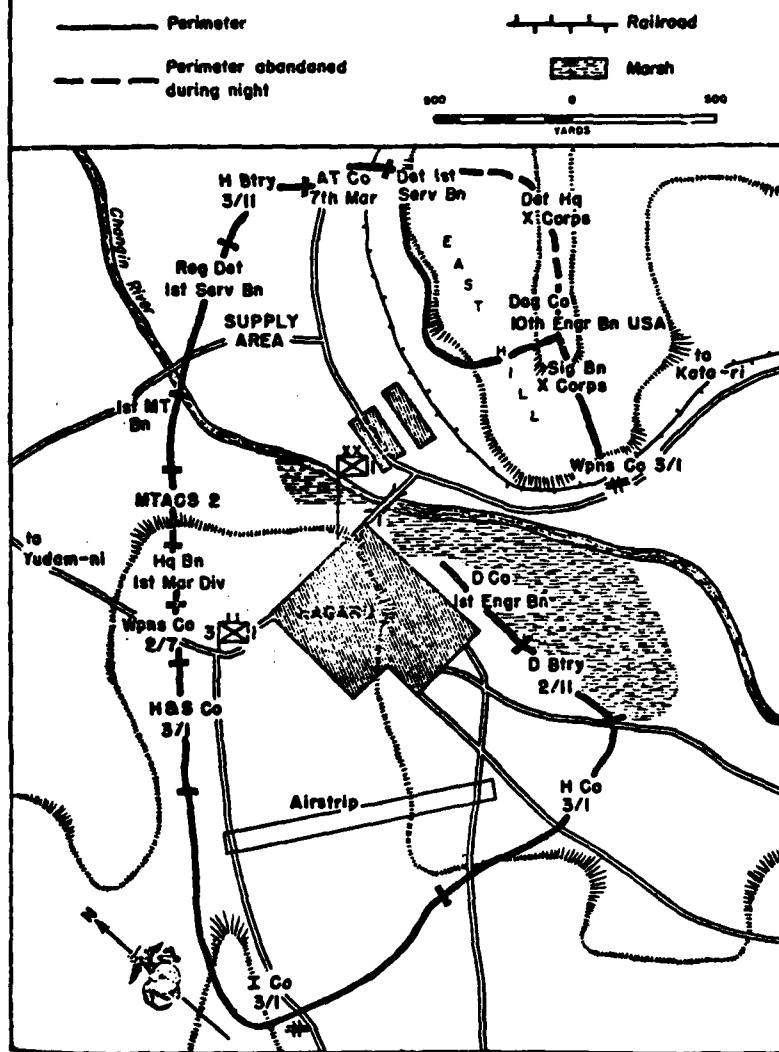
3/1 reached Hagaru early on the night of November 26 under orders to move rapidly to help defend it. It had to leave Co. G and a platoon of the Weapons Company at Chigyon (10 miles south of Hungnam) for lack of transportation. Hagaru lay just below Chosin Reservoir, a bombed-out town on a frozen plain next to the frozen Changin River. It was bordered on 3 sides by low hills and on the east by steep hills (Map 4).



MAP 3

## HAGARU DEFENSIVE PERIMETER

28-29 November 1950



MAP 4

November 27

Early this day, 3/1 (-) took up perimeter positions along with 2/7 (-) (less than two companies), in coordination with the CO of 2/7. Various service support units held positions on the perimeter including the Division Hq Bn (arrived this night from Hungnam) and several artillery batteries and engineer and signal companies (Map 4). 3/1 (-) occupied a large part of the 4-mile perimeter, in the northwest, west, south, and southeast sectors. Had forces been available, two regiments would have been the logical force to defend this perimeter. Dispositions were made for an expected, but not certain, attack.

The best enemy approaches were via a draw past the air strip and from the high hills to the northwest of the river. With too few forces, the CO 3/1 decided not to readjust his positions (which were formerly held by 2/7) until he gained more intelligence about enemy capabilities. Co. I 3/1 replaced Co. F 2/7, the only remaining company of 2/7, at the southwest corner of the perimeter. This day the Division CP was established in Hagaru, coming north from Hungnam.

First 2/7's Weapons Co., then a reinforced platoon of Co. H, 3/1 attempted to come to the relief of Co. F 2/7 at Toktong Pass, north of Hagaru, but after a fire-fight halfway there, Toktong disengaged at 1530 and withdrew, in the face of 300 attacking CCF infantry. A patrol from Co. I 3/1 met 150 Chinese troops to the southwest. By evening, air reports showed that Chinese road blocks had cut all connections between Yudam-ni, Toktong, Hagaru, and Koto-ri. Ground and air intelligence established that a division force lay 5 miles to the southwest of Hagaru.

November 28

The 3/1 CO therefore deployed Cos. H and I in a continuous sector to the southwest 2300 yards long. Because this line was so long, 3/1 had to rely

heavily on supporting arms to cover gaps. The second dangerous approach, EAST HILL, was to be defended by Co. G on arrival, but this company was held up for the night at Koto-ri by the Division Executive Officer since the road north was blocked.

At 1500, Lieut. Colonel Ridge was designated by the Division as Hagaru Defense Commander. Three hours before dark, Ridge held a defense conference, seeking among other things to get a complete list of all military elements in Hagaru.

In place of Co. G, he deployed an engineer company and elements of Corps Headquarters, commanded by two officers from 3/1. Between Cos. H and I were a grab-bag of detachments, while a subsector north of EAST HILL was commanded by the Lieut. Colonel commanding the Supply Detachment. The positions facing west and southwest were hastily sandbagged, unprotected gaps were mined, and concertina wire was deployed.

At 2230, the CCF attack began from the expected direction. First, 5- to 10-man patrols probed. Enemy phosphorus fires accurately struck and marked the defense line. Ten minutes later came the main attack with infantry waves closing to grenade-throwing range. The brunt of the attack hit an area about 800 yards wide in the center where Cos. H and I joined. Supporting Marine fires were extremely accurate and caused heavy enemy casualties. In the Co. H sector, the CCF rolled down the hills, rising to attack almost at the perimeter. 3rd Platoon, Co. H was especially hard hit, losing many men to artillery fire. The Company communications were cut. At 0030, the enemy broke through the 3rd Platoon, Co. H area and penetrated to the Company CP. It became difficult to tell enemy from friend. Some CCF even fired on bulldozer operators on the air-strip. The CO, Co. H temporarily filled the gap with five men, while one of his lieutenants rounded up another detachment to help plug the hole.

By midnight, fires were hitting all sectors of the perimeter, even penetrating the improvised hospital behind Co. I. The Chinese surrounded

the Co. H CP and galley. For some reason, they did not exploit this breakthrough, but instead moved in small groups without purpose or concentration within the perimeter. Co. H now at 0030 received 50 reinforcements. Meanwhile, Co. I was continuously heavily engaged but prevented any breakthrough.

At 0115, a small enemy column, apparently having lost direction, entered the Weapons Co. area, and was annihilated by heavy weapons fires. At 0145, an enemy unit attacked the supply unit defenders on EAST HILL with grenades, and took this position, threatening the Division CP. But they had attacked in too few numbers to exploit this breakthrough. Instead, they held fast on the hill. In the battle on EAST HILL, of 77 U.S. engineers, there were 10 KIA, 25 WIA, and 9 MIA, while a unit of 90 ROK's lost about 50. One gap was so strongly defended by artillery fire alone that the enemy could not penetrate. This Battery, D/11, fired 2000 rounds, repeatedly breaking up formations to the rear. The 60mm mortars of the two rifle companies fired 3200 rounds during the night.

About 0430, the enemy attack ceased. The force that had broken through in the Co. H area was still inside the Marine lines. A platoon now launched a counterattack, restoring the MLR. Co. H casualties for the night were 16 KIA and 39 WIA.

November 29

In the morning, CCF forces still held EAST HILL. A rag-tag force, mainly engineers, but detachments of all sorts, was organized by the 3/1 Exec. at the CO's direction to attack and regain EAST HILL. The force lacked fire support weapons, and most troops lacked infantry experience. Heavily supported from the air, they nonetheless fell short of the ridge top after fighting over exhausting, rugged terrain for six hours. Small Chinese forces were able to exploit the cut-up terrain to give ground slowly, while the U.S. forces exhausted themselves in the uphill climb.

Here a new defensive line was formed. An engineer platoon attempted a flanking attack, but it could not dislodge a CCF platoon on the military crest because no supporting fires were available. By late afternoon the defense consisted of three engineer platoons under command of the 3/1 Exec. This night, it was still touch and go whether another attack could be withstood, as the arrival of Co. G, an Army infantry company, four platoons of tanks, and 41st Commando, Royal Marines from Koto-ri was expected.

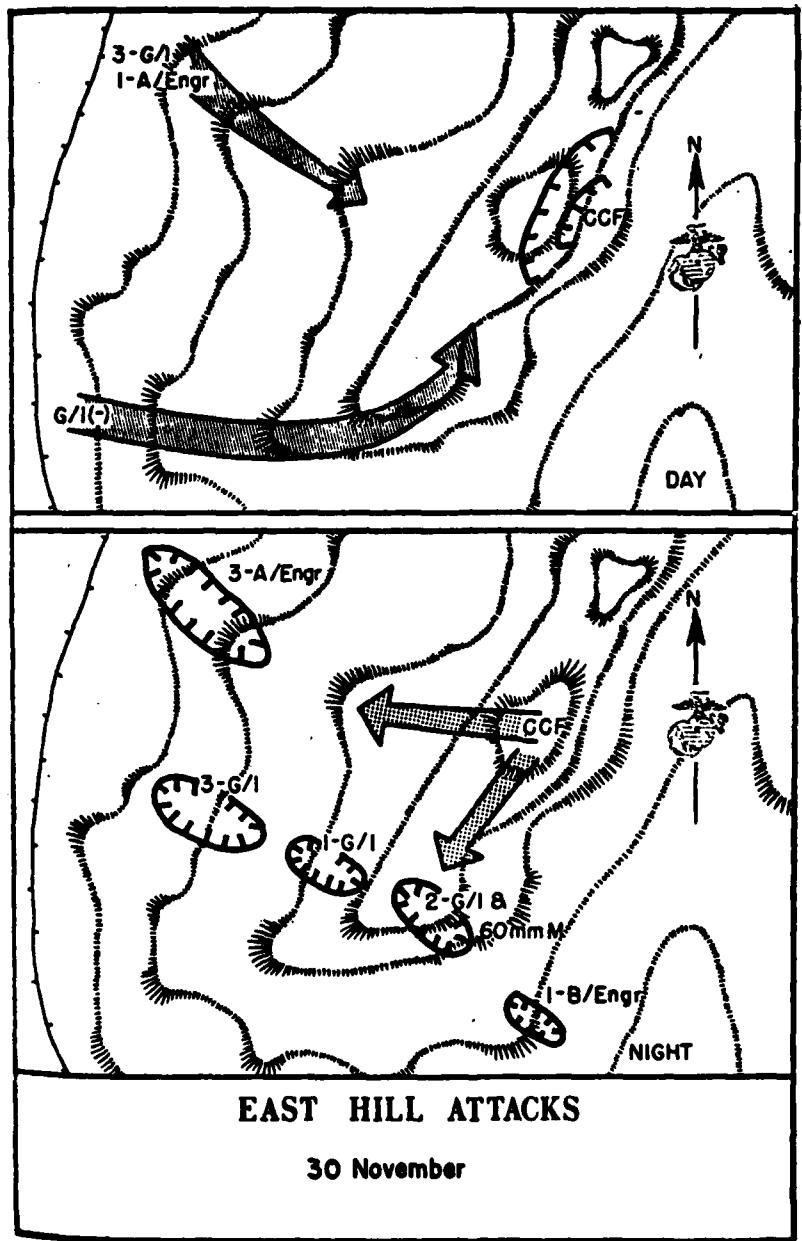
Meanwhile, a Task Force formed at Koto-ri and commanded by British Lt. Col. Drysdale was ordered by General Smith to reach Hagaru at all costs. It included his commando unit of 235 men, Co. G 3/1, Co. B 31st Infantry, and two tank companies. This force had to capture successive hills overlooking the MSR and repeatedly dismount to drive off roadblocks. Halfway to Hagaru, the convoy was cut in half by a concentrated attack from flanking hills. The rear half suffered 321 casualties (including 48 from G 3/1), and part of the force had to surrender. But the forward half fought its way into Hagaru, bringing about two-thirds of Co. G's strength and about 170 commandos. The force remained in reserve in Hagaru this night (November 29).

#### November 30

After a quiet night, the CO 3/1 ordered Co. G to retake EAST HILL. Despite a flanking attack by one 3/1 and two engineer platoons (Map 5), Co. G was unable to dislodge the Chinese either frontally or in flank. Co. G then set up defensive positions at approximately the previous day's perimeter, short of the military crest of EAST HILL.

#### November 30-December 1

This night the CCF launched a better coordinated attack than on November 28, but in a well-defended area. At midnight, the CCF struck the Co. I



MAP 5

A-116

front, which by now was thoroughly organized and backed by strong supporting fires. This reinforced company shattered wave after wave of Chinese, suffering a loss of only 2 KIA and 10 WIA, while killing an estimated 500 to 750.

The Chinese also attacked EAST HILL this night. Holding there (see Map 5), were from right to left: a reduced-strength engineer company, the 3 reduced-strength platoons of Co. G, another engineer company, and to the left, not shown in Map 5, another engineer battalion and 2 tanks. The force was commanded by Captain Carl L. Sitter, CO, Co. G.

The 3rd platoon, Co. A Engineers was driven to the bottom of the hill, losing 28 men, where the CCF were destroyed in a counterattack. A gap between 3rd platoon Co. G and this force was effectively covered by a rolling barrage of artillery and by tank fire. By 0100, Chinese pressure on the Co. G platoons was so heavy that a reserve had to be improvised from "all available hands." This plugged the line of the 1st platoon, which had been reduced by casualties to a squad. At dawn, the EAST HILL defenders had held their perimeter intact. Co. G had suffered 60 casualties; the Chinese casualties had been massive.

As this phase of operations ended (a high-level decision would now result in a fighting withdrawal of the 1st Marine Division and those Army units still at Chosin Reservoir to Hungnam for evacuation by sea), an estimate of enemy casualties in the Hagaru area was made. The 3/1 estimate, considered fairly accurate was: in 58th CCF Division - 6800, divided equally among 3 regiments; and in 59th CCF Division - 1750, all in the 176th Regiment. Known Chinese dead in the two night battles at Hagaru were more than 1500. Total casualties including those destroyed by air in the Hagaru area were estimated at 7500 to 10,000.

3/1's losses were 33 KIA, 10 DOW, 2 MIA, and 270 WIA, virtually all for the period November 28-December 1.

#### AFTER-ACTION SUMMARY

3/1 minus Co. G reached Hagaru late November 26. On November 27, it took up a perimeter defense, strengthened by miscellaneous service support and headquarters troops. After a futile attempt to help 2/7 disengage north of Hagaru, 3/1 this day and on November 28 prepared a coordinated defense of Hagaru, with Cos. H and I as its core facing one of the two most likely directions of attack, and an improvised force defending against the other, likely direction, EAST HILL. CO 3/1 became Hagaru Defense Commander at 1500.

The defense withstood a prolonged CCF night attack, restoring the perimeter by dawn at all points including a platoon-sized penetration area, except at EAST HILL, where the high ground was lost. Enemy casualties were heavy, the defenders' moderate.

On November 29, a mixed and inexperienced improvised force of reinforced company size attacked to restore the EAST HILL position, but was stopped short of the military crest. The evening Co. G(-) and part of a British Commando unit fought their way into Hagaru. The CCF did not attack this night.

On November 30, Co. G (-) supported by an engineer battalion was ordered to take the EAST HILL crest. It failed to do so in the face of small but stubborn CCF defenses. This night, the CCF launched a second major attack on the perimeter. It was completely blunted in the Co. I sector at the cost of many enemy casualties. The CCF drove down the northern slope in a part of EAST HILL, where their penetrating forces were cut down. The center of this sector, defended by Co. G, held.

The CCF offensive to take Hagaru cost them 1,500 known dead infantrymen. Many times that number were wounded. In the area as a whole, air, artillery, and infantry caused at least 6,800 casualties. 3/1 casualties were 348 plus 105 frostbite cases.

As the 4-mile perimeter was defended by an extremely thin force, air attacks by day served to reduce the enemy forces available for night attack, while at night supporting artillery and mortars played a major role in covering gaps and holding the key areas attacked.

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ENGAGEMENT 30. BATTALION DEFENSIVE OPERATIONS 3RD BN, 1ST MARINES TO HELP SHORE UP AN EXPOSED DIVISION FLANK IN A MAJOR BREAKTHROUGH AND RETROGRADE MOVEMENT NEAR HWACHON, SOUTH KOREA, APRIL 22-27, 1951

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INTRODUCTION

This engagement describes the operations of the 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines, in a rapid-response action to help protect the Division left flank and participate in its disengagement and withdrawal after a Communist Chinese Forces (CCF) breakthrough and collapse of the 6th ROK Division on its left. The sections of this engagement report and their subject matter are:

• General Situation Before Engagement

This summarizes the redeployment of the 1st Marine Division to the IX Corps front from North Korea, the Corps troop dispositions, and the coming Chinese Spring Offensive.

• Unit Background

This summarizes the experience of 3/1 and its senior officers from first deployment in Korea until this engagement.

• Pre-Engagement Operations

This summarizes the employment and activity of the Division on the eve of the CCF offensive.

• The Engagement

This describes chronologically the battle missions and actions of 3/1 within the context of related regimental, division and corps operations from April 22 to April 27.

• After-Action Summary

This summarizes 3/1's battle actions and results during the period.

## GENERAL SITUATION BEFORE ENGAGEMENT

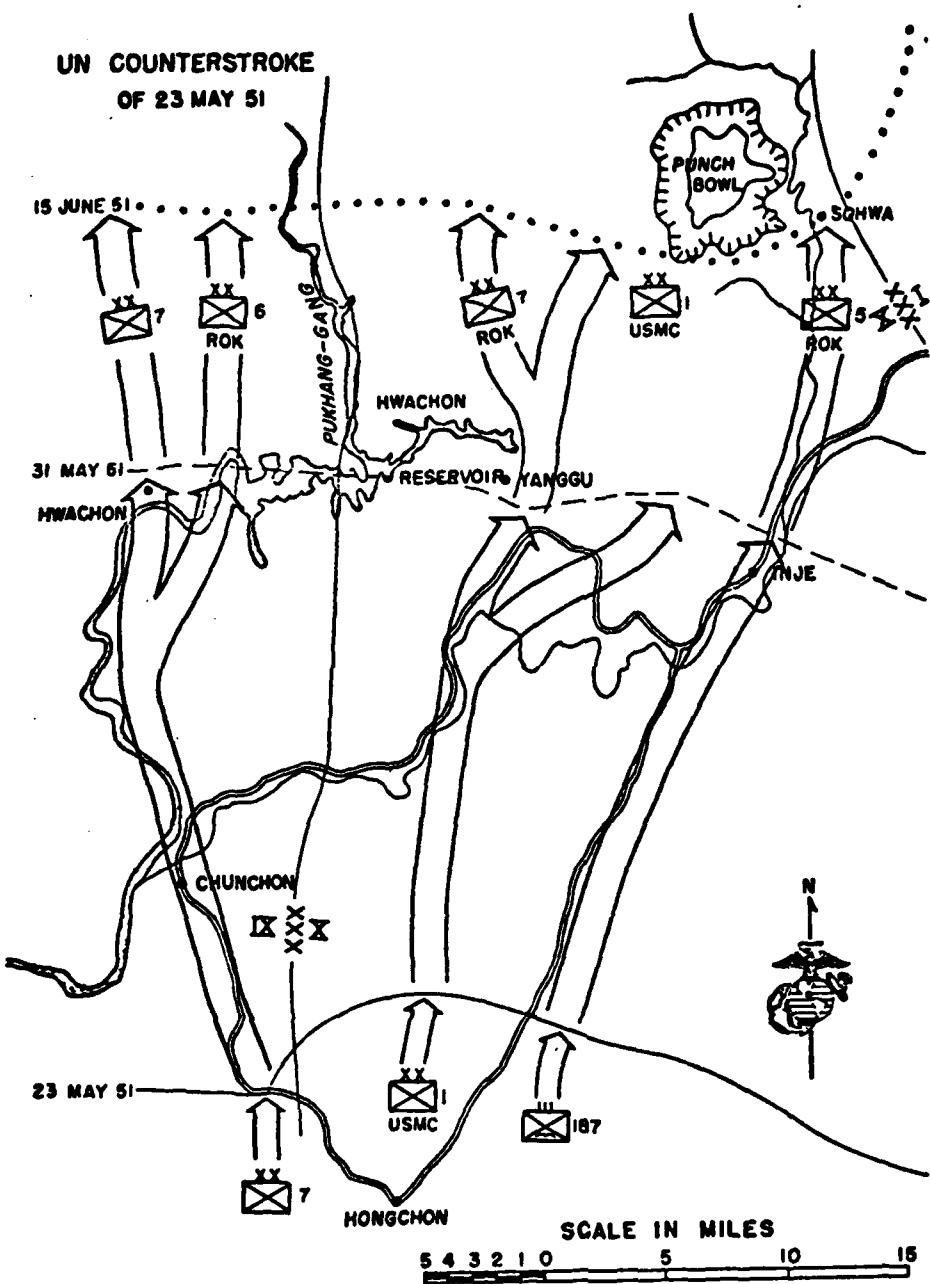
### Troop Dispositions

Late in December 1950, the 1st Marine Division was evacuated by sea from Hungnam, then moved to Masan west of Pusan, where it was reequipped. It was then moved to the Pohang-Andong area to take up blocking positions in face of the CCF January-February offensive expected down the Seoul corridor. After the U.N. forces withstood this attack, the Division served in the U.S. offensive known as operation RIPPER to the southeast of Chunchon (Map 1).

The Chinese withdrew to the north of Hongchon in the first half of March. On April 10, 1951, the 1st Marine Division was on Line KANSAS, north of Chunchon above the 38th parallel, poised for a planned attack to Line QUANTICO (Map 2). This was called off when General MacArthur was recalled by President Truman the next day. MacArthur's recall resulted indirectly in assumption of command of Eighth Army by Lieutenant General James A Van Fleet, USA. A new IX Army directive adjusted the boundary between the 1st Marine Division and the 6th ROK Division on its left. For the next 10 days the Division remained inactive (Map 3), awaiting orders for a postponed offensive under the new Army commander. 1st Marine Division was just south of Hwachon Reservoir and east of the Pukhan-gang River. On its right was the 2d Army Infantry Division.

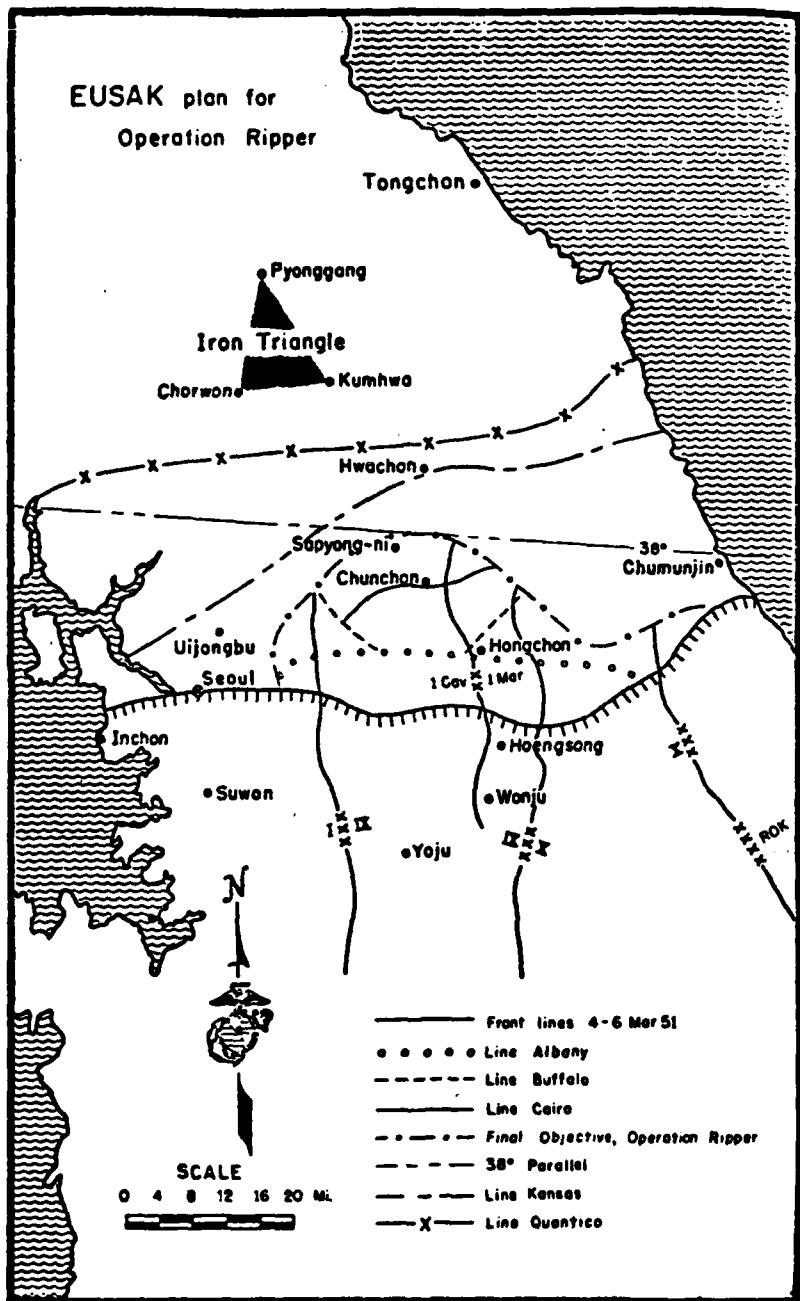
### The CCF Spring Offensive

Early in April, prisoners revealed that a major Chinese offensive was scheduled to begin April 22, with the main effort against IX Corps, which included 1st Marine Division and the 6th ROK Division. The build-up was observed, and intelligence identified elements opposite IX Corps from 20th, 26th, 39th and 40th CCF Armies, totalling about 90,000 men. The first two of these armies had fought the Marines at Chosin Reservoir. Two additional CCF armies were in reserve.



MAP 1

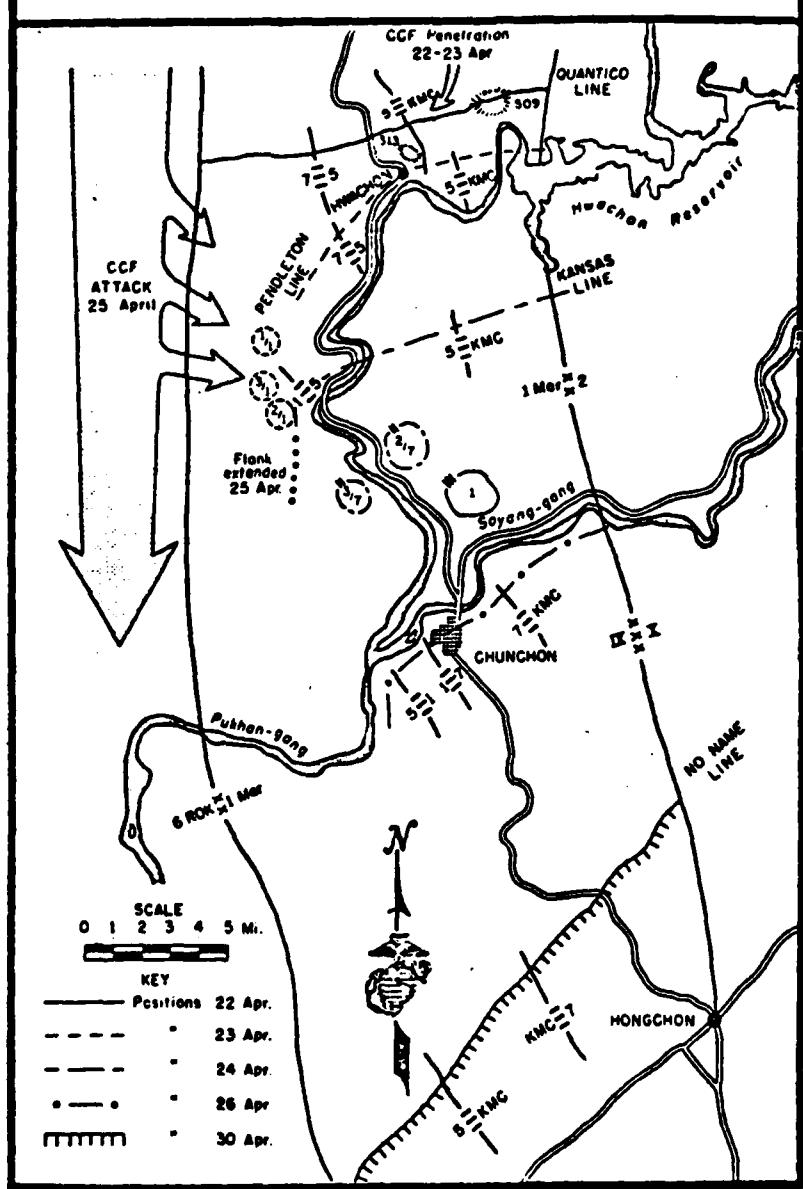
A-122



MAP 2

A-123

**CCF Offensive Starting 22 April  
And Subsequent Marine Withdrawals**



MAP 3

### UNIT BACKGROUND

1st Marines were brought to full strength at Camp Pendleton in August, 1950. The regiment and 3/1 participated in the Inchon amphibious landing, the capture of Seoul, the advance through North Korea to the Chosin Reservoir, the fighting withdrawal after CCF intervention into the Hagaru Perimeter, and then to Hungnam, where the Division was withdrawn by sea. In all these operations, it was commanded by Lieut. Colonel Thomas L. Ridge, Major Reginald R. Myers served as Exec, and all but one company had continuous commanders. (The CO Co. G was wounded and replaced October 30). On February 18, Lieut. Colonel Virgil W. Banning assumed command. Except for two weeks in May, he continued to command through the beginning of this engagement until wounded and evacuated. Major Myers was Executive through all these operations including the first part of this engagement, when he was also wounded and evacuated.

### PRE-ENGAGEMENT OPERATIONS

On April 21, 1st Marine Division resumed the attack toward the KANSAS Line, 7th Marines on the left, 5th Marines in the center, and the KMC regiment on the right, with 1st Marines in Division Reserve. They easily advanced 5,000 to 9,000 yards. A gap of 2500 yards opened between the Division and the 6th ROK Division, which failed to keep contact. The KMC regiment had the mission to gain control of the Hwachon Reservoir area. Meanwhile, spotters on mountain tops watched for signs of a CCF offensive, and there were frequent air battles over the area.

On April 22, Marine ground units resumed the offensive, and were now north of the Pukhan River near the QUANTICO Line (Map 3). Patrols found signs of the presence of CCF patrol forces on the Division left flank.

## THE ENGAGEMENT

April 22

Orders for the Division advance were cancelled, and replaced by patrolling and consolidation of forces. The 6th ROK Division had come under heavy attack. Prisoner reports gave the Division 2-hour notice of a major CCF offensive.

By midnight, the entire 6th ROK Division had collapsed. At 2130, the 1st Marines ordered one battalion (1/1) to protect the left flank (Map 3). It was enroute by midnight, moving through the remnants of the ROK Division. The first of the Marines to be hit, (by a holding attack, as it turned out) were the KMC and the 5th Marines near HILLS 509 and 313. A fight for the summit of HILL 313 ensued. On the extreme left, 1/7 felt the heaviest of the initial blows, about 2000 men of the 358th CCF regiment. 1/1 took position to the left of 1/7. By dawn, the enemy was observed from the air attacking across the entire Korean peninsula, but with the main effort in the IX Corps sector. On the left of the 6th ROK Division, the 24th Army Infantry Division bent its right flank back, while 27th Brigade of the British Commonwealth Division established a blocking position behind the gap. 1st Marine Division was supported by 42 close air strikes as it readjusted its positions.

April 23

By dawn the entire 1st Marine Division left flank was exposed to attack by Chinese forces, which had poured into the gap left by 6th ROK Division. IX Corps now ordered the Division to fall back to Line PENDLETON and to bend its left flank toward the river (Map 3). As 7th Marines bent its flank toward the left on this line, 3/1 (the subject of this report) and 1/1 were ordered to take positions facing west. Just short of its new position, 1/1 was joined by the 92d Armored Field Artillery

Battalion, which had been supporting the ROK Division, and was now deployed to fight as infantry. With 1/1 in place, 1/7 was able to disengage and withdraw through it. Early this day 3/1 entrucked and, like the rest of the 1st Marines, deployed west of the Pukhan-gang River. It rapidly took up a position to the north of 1/1 facing west (Map 4). This position was atop a 3,000-foot hill (902), which dominates the surrounding terrain, a position which 3/1 gained by a hard, fast climb in a race against a CCF unit ascending from the opposite side.

To hold the summit, 3/1 had to control three nearby ridge lines. The CO put Co. G at the apex of a triangular formation, Co. H to its left, and Co. I on the right. Heavy machine guns of the Weapons Co. were distributed among the rifle companies, and the 81mm mortars were placed 10 to 20 yards back.

With the KMC regiment and 5th Marines withdrawn to the PENDLETON line, the 1st Marines and 3/7 prepared to hold off the CCF thrust toward and beyond Hill 902 and Hill 546 (Horseshoe Ridge). First the CCF hit 1/1 on Horseshoe Ridge at 1000, attacking steadily but without gain for 4 hours. At midnight, another force attacked 3/1 on Hill 902, preceding this with two hours of harassing mortar fire. 3/1 could not dig in well because of the rocky character of the hill. The position received artillery support from elements of 11th Marines, and from remnants of 987th AFA Battalion which had been struck hard earlier while supporting the 6th ROK Division. Attacks by the CCF 359th and 360th regiments of 120th Division on both 3/1 and 3/7 continued throughout the night, while 2 companies of 1st Tank Battalion covered the gap between 3/7 and 1/1 with fires.

#### April 24

It was now necessary to disengage and withdraw in order to strengthen the Division front and better protect its flanks. IX Corps ordered all 1st Marine Division units to withdraw to the KANSAS Line. Each battalion

Action of 1/1 at Horseshoe Ridge, 3/1 on 902,  
and Subsequent Withdrawals, 23-25 April



MAP 4

disengaged using company strength rearguards, and slowly withdrew to the Pukhan River. In 3/7's sector, artillery engaged the CCF with direct fire, and accounted for 179 dead CCF with a loss of 4 KIA and 11 WIA. Some 49 Corsairs, 40 Navy AD's, and a few F-51's gave close air support to the division as it withdrew.

By now the CCF breakthrough in the 6th ROK Division area had been stopped by Canadian and Australian units. By afternoon, the 1st Marine Division had consolidated sufficiently to move 7th Marines into reserve positions defending Chunchon. This night, the CCF probed for a breakthrough, but the 1st Marines sealed off these efforts.

April 25

In the afternoon, 3/1 sent a patrol 200 yards along a ridge line west of the river, in the area of Hill 480. Here it ran into concentrated mortar and machine gun fire. (Daylight combat had been unusual until this CCF offensive.) CCF mortar fire hit the battalion CP, wounding Colonel Francis M. McAlister (1st Marines CO since January 25), Lieut. Colonel Banning, (Co, 3/1), Major Reginald R. Myers, the Battalion Exec, and Major Joseph D. Trompeter, the S-3. Banning and Myers were evacuated, and Major Trompeter assumed command.

This night CCF action was limited to probing attacks and sporadic mortar fire. IX Corps now ordered a further division withdrawal, as an important lateral road had been cut. The Division was ordered to withdraw to Chunchon and defend the south bank of the Soyang River, tying in on the right to the 2d Army Infantry Division at the southern extension of Hwachon Reservoir. (This line is shown on Map 2 as "Position 26 April.") There the Division would protect withdrawal of supplies; and later it would effect a further withdrawal to the line shown in Map 2 as "NO NAME LINE," astride the HONGCHON-CHUNCHON MSR. Withdrawal to the CHUNCHON (April 26) LINE was to begin the morning of April 26.

April 26

With 1/1, 2/1, 3/5, and 3/7 defending the west bank approaches to the MOJIN bridge and ferry sites, 3/1 and other units crossed at night without enemy interference, as did the four rearguard battalions listed above. The crossing was defended by continuous artillery fire.

On this day, the CCF made its major effort to capture Seoul in I Corps area and was repulsed; and on April 27 and 28, 1st Marine Division completed withdrawal to "NO NAME LINE" without interference.

AFTER-ACTION SUMMARY

On April 22, 1st Marine Division advance was ordered halted in view of the CCF offensive and collapse of the 6th ROK Division on its left. On April 23, 3/1 was given a mission to help protect the Division flank by seizing Hill 902. It captured the hill that evening and held it for 2 days against strong attacks. On April 25, it disengaged and formed a new blocking position west of Hill 480. This day its CO and Exec were wounded and evacuated. It held this position until ordered to disengage and cross the Pukhan River the night of April 26, which it did without incident. It then withdrew along with the Division to 2 successive division defense lines. The period was characterized by both hasty and deliberate defenses and disengagements against forces superior in number.

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ENGAGEMENT 31. BATTLE OF BUNKER HILL. BATTLE FOR HILL POSITIONS IN WESTERN KOREA, 3RD BN, 1ST MARINES, 1ST MARINE DIVISION, AUGUST 9-17, 1952

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This engagement describes the operations of the 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines, together with attached units, and related actions of other units of the Division, in a series of offensive-defensive operations to maintain an outpost line and secure the MLR in a position northwest of Seoul, Republic of Korea.

The sections of this engagement report and their subject matter are:

- General Situation Before the Engagement

This describes the deployment of the division, the strategic importance of the area, the experience and posture of the enemy, and the general character of preceding combat in the area.

- Unit Background

This summarizes the prior combat experience of 3/1 during the Korean War and the degree of combat experience of the personnel just prior to the engagement.

- Pre-Engagement Operations

This summarizes the specific deployments of both sides, Marine preparations before the engagement, the most recent CCF tactics, and the key terrain features.

- The Engagement

This describes chronologically the operations of 3/1 and attached and supporting units, from August 9 until August 17.

- After-Action Summary

This summarizes special features of the Marine defense tactics and supporting fires, and the scale of the fires used by both the Marines and the CCF. It also summarizes the mission accomplishment of the battalion, overall and day-by-day.

## GENERAL SITUATION BEFORE THE ENGAGEMENT

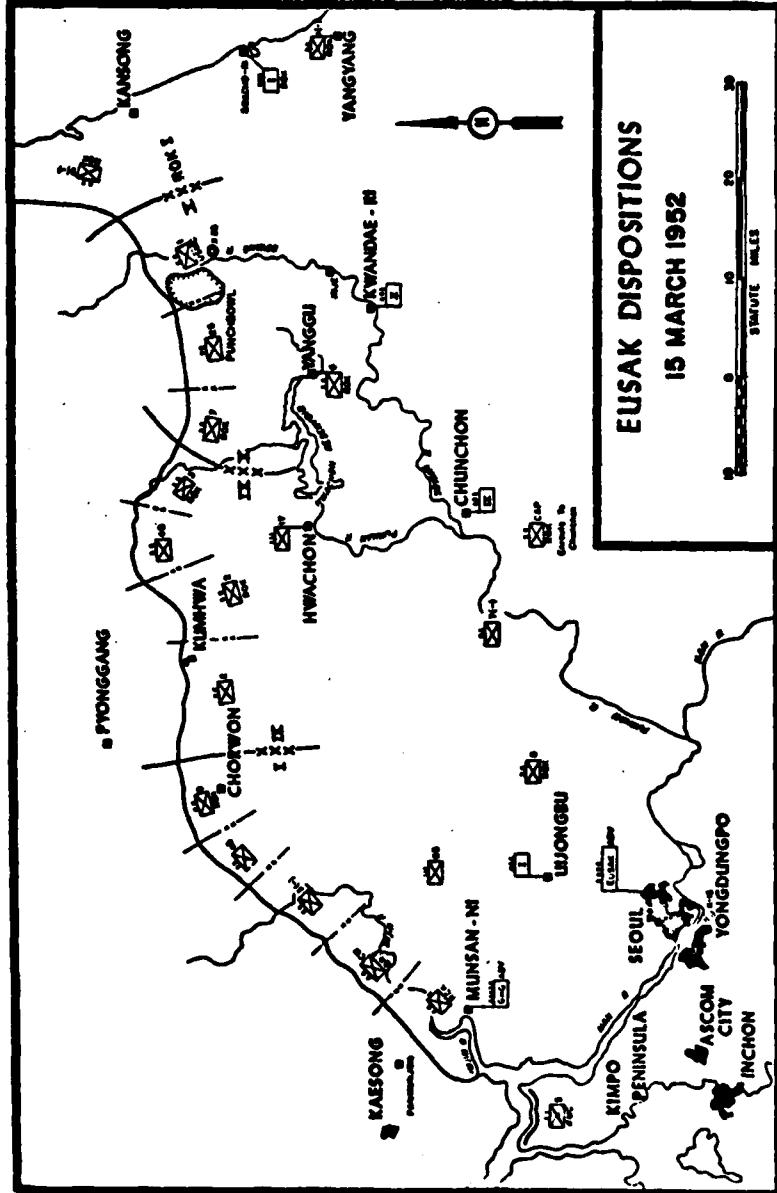
### The Situation

In March 1952, the 1st Marine Division, then with the U.S. Eighth Army near the Soyang River in east-central Korea, was transferred to the western flank in the I Corps sector to the north of Seoul and just north of Munsan-ni. Here it replaced the 1st ROK Division, because CG EUSAK believed that this approach to Seoul and the Kimpo Peninsula, a likely route of attack, was not strongly enough held (Map 1).

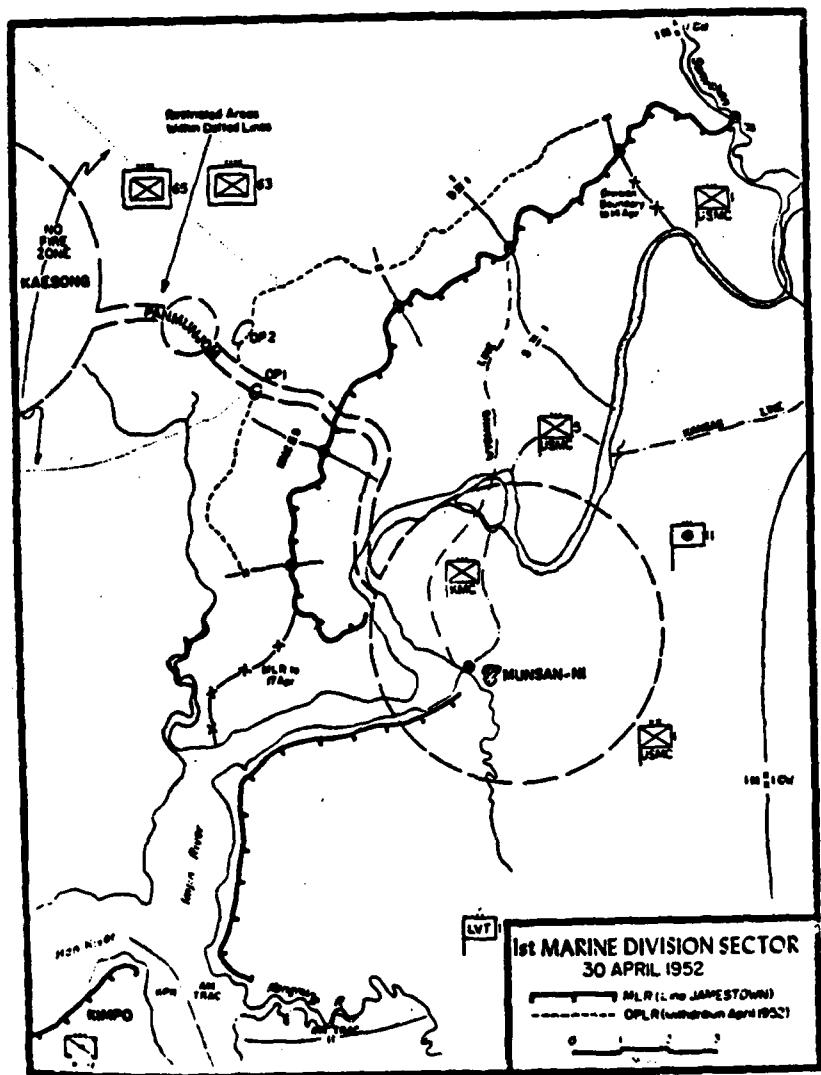
The 1st KMC Regiment took position on the left flank, the 1st Marines in the center, and the 5th Marines arriving later, on the right. Two battalions of 7th Marines formed the Division reserve, while 2/7 was assigned to the Kimpo Peninsula where it served as a maneuver element to back up a Provisional Regiment based on the 5th KMC Battalion and a ROK Security Battalion.

The MLR was known as the JAMESTOWN LINE. In the reinforced Division area, it stretched across 30 miles of rugged terrain, a far longer frontage than normal for a division defense. Yet it was the most likely route for invading South Korea. In event of a major Chinese offensive, this area had to be held at all cost. The sector and the approximate position of the MLR at the time of BUNKER HILL are shown in Map 2.

Opposite the 1st Marine Division were the 63rd and 65th CCF Armies. Both sides had posted OP's quite close to each other. Under directives of both higher commands, limited offensive operations were actively conducted throughout the spring, both to ensure against surprise attack and to back the Panmunjom negotiations with strength. The Marine Division built extensive fortifications in the MLR. The Chinese fortifications were even stronger, and their front-line troops could withstand



MAP 1



MAP 2

A-134

artillery barrages readily so long as they stayed in their prepared positions. Efforts to secure, to hold, or to recapture OP's often involved intensive fighting in exposed positions in a very hilly, rugged terrain.

#### THE ENEMY

As a result of its long combat experience in the offensive of 1950, the drive south of Seoul, and the subsequent fighting withdrawal to a line just above the 38th parallel, the CCF had gained enormous experience, had greatly strengthened its air support and air defense, and had refined its artillery technique to the point of great responsiveness and precision of fires. It had always been skilled in night fighting, a skill which the Marines in turn had polished and by now used regularly.

#### UNIT BACKGROUND

3/1 was organized after the Korean War started. It had participated in the Inchon operation, the Battle of Seoul, the advance to Hagaru, defense of that town against CCF encirclement, and the Division fighting withdrawal from North Korea. Later it played an active role under the Eighth Army in the major advance to the Hwachon Reservoir, in blunting the CCF early Spring Offensive of 1951, in the subsequent U.S. offensive, and in blunting the second CCF offensive in May. It then fought in the bloody fighting at the "Punchbowl" and in seizure of the high terrain to the north of there. Thereafter, it participated in the kind of trench and salient positional warfare in Eastern Korea that it was to experience again in the present area.

By this time, the policy of rapid rotation of personnel had long been in effect. The unit contained a small core of men who had had active combat experience in 1951 and few if any who had fought in the 1950 winter campaign. The CO, Lieut. Colonel Gerard T. Armitage, took command May 2, about 3 months before this engagement. The Executive Officer,

Major Wesley R. Christie, assumed command July 3, five weeks before the engagement. The Regimental CO had taken command 15 days before.

#### PRE-ENGAGEMENT OPERATIONS

##### General Activity

In the last week of July, because of torrential rains, contacts and casualties were very few, in contrast to serious fighting for terrain-dominant outposts earlier in the month. The reserve regiment, 7th Marines, was engaged in building a second defense line, the KANSAS LINE, just south of the Imjin River behind the sector held by the 5th Marines.

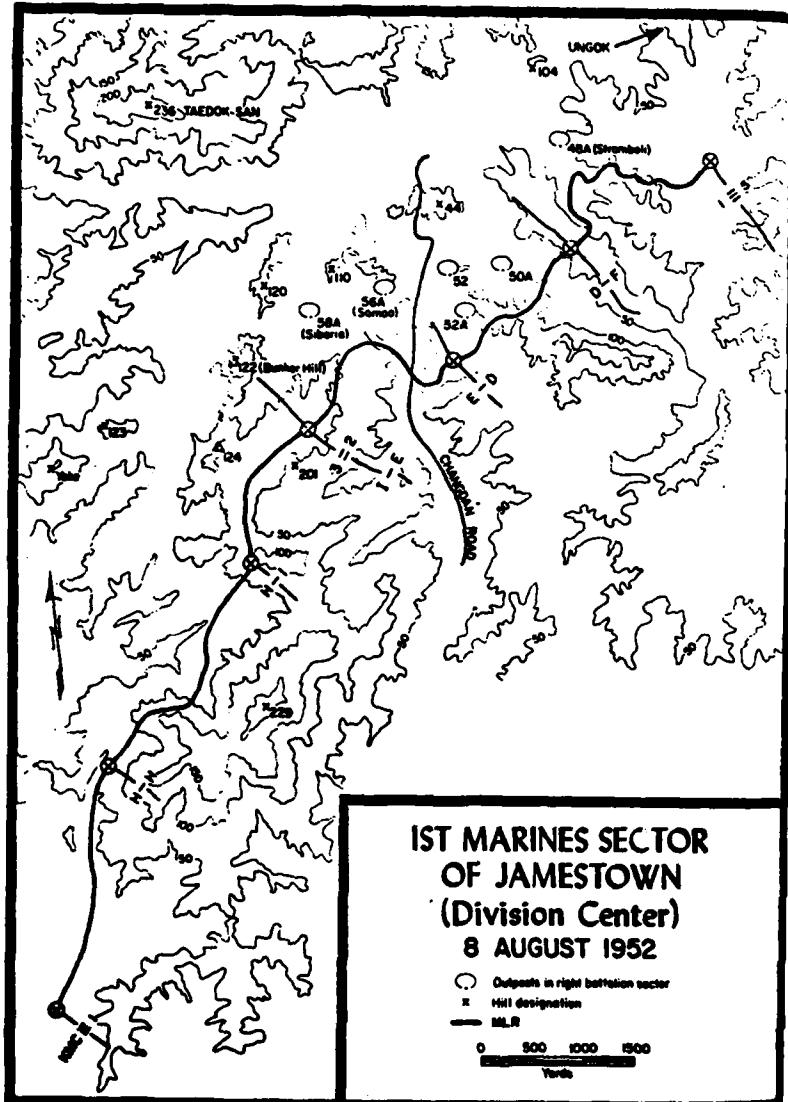
##### Enemy Activity and Tactics

The enemy continued an active defense, gradually advancing its outpost line by creeping tactics. Since April, the CCF would customarily occupy new key terrain at night, prepare fortifications, then withdraw before daylight. Once these positions were sufficiently prepared to hold, the Chinese would occupy them. Thus, for four months, the Chinese had moved their OP Line much closer to the U.S. MLR opposite I Corps.

It seemed evident that the Chinese hoped eventually to gain the dominant hill, 229 (Map 3), by a limited penetration of the Marine-held MLR, in preparation for a later offensive aimed at Seoul.

##### Mission

The Marine mission during this period was to conduct an aggressive defense of the EUSAK left flank. In the process, they had learned much of Chinese small-unit tactics. Typically, the CCF would make a diversionary frontal assault, while a maneuver force made a main effort to envelop and attack the defenders from the rear. Among other techniques, in response to friendly target-marking with white phosphorus, they would also fire WP,



MAP 3

A-137

to conceal the target and confuse our artillery. For counterattacks, they used a squad-sized wedge formation, supported by well-coordinated mortar fires and snipers dug into flanking holes.

#### Enemy Strength and Dispositions

Units of two Chinese divisions faced the 3603 men of the 1st Marines. The Chinese units were elements of the 580th Regiment of 194th Division, and of the 352nd and 354th Regiments of 118th Division. The 352d Regiment held most of the area where BUNKER HILL would take place. It was supported by the fires of the division artillery regiment, and often by that of the 354th. The CCF combat efficiency was rated excellent and they were well supplied.

#### Terrain

HILL 201, 660' high, was the dominating height in the JAMESTOWN Line. In the enemy zone, HILL 236, Taedok-san, was the highest hill in the entire area. Only slightly lower, in the rear of the Marines' area, was HILL 229. HILL 122, a Marine OP which would come to be called BUNKER HILL, would be the culminating focus of the battle. But this would be preceded by fights for many other OP's. Those of special importance were HILL 58A (SIBERIA), HILL 56A (SAMOA), and HILL 48A (STROMBOLI), all Marine OP's.

#### THE ENGAGEMENT

##### August 9-10

The battle opened August 9, in the sector of 2/1. At 0100, 4 enemy squads attacked and captured SIBERIA, as the OP squad withdrew to the MLR. A platoon-sized counterattack three hours later failed to retake the hill, in the face of heavy artillery and mortar fire, and 32 Marines were WIA. A much larger Marine daylight attack, heavily supported by

air, took the hill against heavy resistance. A new CCF attack with heavy supporting fires drove the Marines off the hill. This force withdrew to the MLR with 75% casualties.

The night of August 10, a new Marine attack, with fresh forces from 1/1, retook HILL 58A in a fierce battle; again the enemy delivered heavy fires on this hill, and drove the Marines off it. Meanwhile, HILL 56A had also been lost.

Now the Marines decided to prepare a quite different plan for restoring the OP Line. Enemy observation from HILLS 122 and 110 had accounted for the deadly fires on HILL 58A. Most of the 260 Marine casualties so far had been from artillery and mortar fire. The Division CG and the Regimental Commander, Colonel Walter F. Layer, decided to capture HILL 122 (BUNKER HILL), using surprise. Surprise would include a diversionary attack on HILL 58A using a reinforced rifle platoon with gun and flame thrower tanks of 2/1. The 5th Marines to the right would contribute to the diversion with fires in the Ungok area. Supporting air, artillery, and tank fires would be delivered on both HILL 122 and HILL 58A.

#### August 11

The diversionary attack started at dusk from the western edge of the 2/1 sector (Map 3). It included M46 tanks with 90mm guns, and flame thrower tanks, as well as tanks with searchlights. They moved via HILL 56A, followed by an infantry platoon, went over HILL 58A and down the far side, meanwhile delivering tank fires on HILL 110. In less than an hour from its departure, a supporting 2/1 platoon of infantry had gained HILL 58A. The Chinese counterattacked briefly, but soon withdrew. Now, the Marine infantry also withdrew by plan.

About 2200, the main force, a company under 2/1 attacked and reached the top of HILL 122 about 2330. Chinese fires were at first light, but soon intensive enemy fires fell on the hill top. Both sides were engaged

with hand grenades fighting for the top. The Chinese pulled back, but soon flanking infantry fires hit the Marine company. Two more firefights occurred in the pre-dawn hours, but at dawn, the Marine company still held the hill. Marine casualties there were 23.

August 12

At noon, 3/1 was given responsibility for BUNKER HILL, and operational control of Co. B/1/1. Consolidation of the Hill defenses proceeded until 1500. When the enemy launched an intense artillery and mortar attack. Heavy casualties compelled Co. B to pull back to the reverse (eastern) slope of the hill.

Out of communication with the company, the CO 3/1 sent Company I forward toward the hill. At about 1600, over 350 Chinese attacked from the direction of HILL 123 (Figure 3), against positions holding the ridge from HILL 122 to HILL 124. Finally, they hit Co. B on the southwestern side of Hill 122. In intensive firing, Co. B stalled the enemy, which withdrew at 1715.

To further consolidate defenses, 3/1 now replaced I/3/1 in the MLR with I/3/7, and placed a 3/1 reconnaissance team on Hill 124 to tie it in to both the MLR and HILL 122. The Division CG moved the Division reserves into 3/1's zone, and attached 2/7 to 3/1 as its battalion reserve. The CO 1st Marines also moved 2 platoons of 1/1 to a reserve position in 3/1's zone. Mortar fires of reserve units, and all artillery were to give priority to BUNKER HILL. "Box-me-in" barrages (fires surrounding friendly forces) were planned for the 81mm mortars and artillery. Ripples of 4.5 inch rockets were to cover deep enemy approaches, while tank fires were to cover the area between BUNKER HILL and the MLR. By 2000, I/3/1 and B/1/1 covered the entire east (reverse) slope of HILL 122 (to avoid the enemy artillery which had caused serious casualties on the crest) and were extending their trenches. There were 400 Chinese on the other slope. The gentle slope to a level ridge permitted the

Marines good fields of fire. Fires from the MLR could also reach the crest.

August 13

After midnight August 12-13, the CCF conducted diversionary attacks. Far to the west, a small-scale attack was made against the KMC, who drove them off, while to the east the CCF suddenly seized HILL 48A. Within an hour, the CCF assaulted the MLR on the extreme right of the 1st Marines (Co. F sector). This company and the HILL 48A force held fast. A fire-fight in the Co. F sector again occurred, the latter now reinforced with a provisional platoon of 2/1's reserve. A series of small skirmishes for HILL 48A followed.

Now came the Chinese attempt to recapture BUNKER HILL. At 0130, a CCF skirmish line attacked I/3/1 frontally and also from the rear. A four-hour battle took place, which was finally repulsed with strong tank, rocket, artillery, and mortar fires, aided by tank illumination. These fires also hit suspected assembly areas in draws approaching HILL 122.

At 0330, an enemy force, later determined to be a battalion plus one company, hit HILL 122. A one-hour battle then followed in which the issue hung in doubt. Enemy infantry fires slackened as its artillery fires increased. The Division made further defensive preparations. On the right facing HILL 48A, a company of the 5th Marines took up a blocking position on the MLR near the left boundary of 5th Marines. To reinforce BUNKER HILL, G/3/7 passed through the MLR, reaching HILL 122 at sunup August 14. Meanwhile two other squads of I/3/7 had been rushed forward from the MLR, for the Marine position at HILL 122 had become precarious. The Chinese began withdrawing from HILL 122, at the same time increasing their artillery fires.

August 14

Now the CO 3/1 sent a fresh company, H/3/7, to the crest of BUNKER HILL and returned B/1/1 to the hill also. By noon, the other 3/7 units had

been withdrawn to regimental reserve. By this time, Marine casualties in the BUNKER HILL area had reached 24 KIA and 214 WIA. Chinese known dead were 210, plus an estimated 470 KIA and 625 WIA. During the period from August 12 at 1500 through August 14, an estimated 5,000 to 10,000 rounds of enemy artillery had fallen in the 1st Marines' area.

At dusk, the CCF carried out diversionary fires for 90 minutes on G/3/1 at the OP nearest Panmunjom (to the west of HILL 123). After continuous mortar fires on the trail that the Marines used to resupply HILL 122, the enemy attacked the Hill with a reinforced company at 2100. They hit H/3/7 frontally and on the right flank. They gained a limited breakthrough, but were eliminated inside the perimeter. The force withdrew, at 2215, at an estimated cost of 175 casualties compared to 28 Marines.

Expecting a new CCF attack on HILL 122, the CO 3/1 sent a platoon of 1/1 to the hill, and the rest of this company was placed in regimental reserve in the 3/1 sector.

The night of August 14/15 was very quiet, until 0115, when a sudden fire fight erupted along the whole ridge including HILLS 124 and 122. "Box-me-in fires" proved effective in holding the attackers off. Now enemy infantry in a draw alongside the ridge system massed, planning to assault BUNKER HILL from the northeast. A searchlight tank discovered them and heavy supporting fires scattered this force. The surprise attack thwarted, the enemy began a heavy artillery and mortar bombardment at 0206. The previously scattered force was meanwhile reorganized and assaulted the Marine hill positions. The Marines replied with rifle, MG, and "box-me-in" fires. By about 0300, enemy supporting fires had dropped from 100 rounds a minute to 3 or 4 a minute. At 0400, all enemy activity ceased. During this night's engagement, the enemy suffered an estimated 350 casualties, while H/3/7 had 7 KIA, 28 WIA.

August 15

During daylight, in a thunderstorm, and without preparatory fires, the Chinese made a probing attack in company strength. They withdrew after an hour, leaving 35 dead; the Marines had 9 casualties.

August 16

After a long period of quiet, at 0400, a force estimated as a battalion attacked the hill from the north and west, supported by moderate fires. One company reached the Marine lines. The CO 3/1 sent a platoon of 3/7 on request from H/3/1. By 0315, the battalion began to withdraw, as a platoon of 3/1 was moved forward prepared for commitment if needed. Four small fire-fights followed early in the evening.

August 17

Before dawn, as C/1/1 moved forward to relieve Company B, it suffered 10 casualties from automatic fires. With this relief, the engagement ends.

AFTER-ACTION SUMMARY

Some Special Features of the Engagement

The CCF employed artillery fires to an unprecedented degree, reportedly often using the fires of 2 artillery regiments to support its Division facing the Marine Division. Artillery and mortar fires accounted for a large part of Marine casualties. Accordingly, the Marines received air and artillery support to suppress these fires at an unprecedented level. Air flew 458 close air support (CAS) missions in support of the OP fighting over 5 days, and on 2 days this sector received CAS priority of all tactical air units supporting EUSAK. These missions hit hilltops, troop assembly areas, mortar locations, and CCF artillery. U.S. artillery

fires were also on an unprecedented scale, and included flak-suppression fires and counter counter-battery deception fires. In one 24-hour period 11th Marines fired 10,652 rounds. "Box-me-in fires" were commonly used, and preparatory fires were heavy except where surprise attacks were made. 28,000 Marine artillery rounds were fired over 5 days, while the CCF fired 17,000 artillery and mortar rounds. Tanks also delivered exceptionally strong supporting fires. Another special feature was Marine use of the reverse-slope defense to compensate for lack of sufficient reserves to make major attacks or hold ground under heavy fires and because of the accuracy and intensity of CCF fires on the hilltops. The reverse-slope defense had not been common in recent Marine operations.

#### Results

The Division's decision to take BUNKER HILL was based on the advantages of surprise, of improved observation and fires, and as a point from which to dominate HILL 58A. (All were indirectly related to securing against a breakthrough of the thinly held MLR.) The first two purposes were achieved; but fires supporting efforts to control HILL 58A proved to be more effectively delivered from the MLR than from HILL 122. For much of the operation, the CO 3/1 commanded, but relied strongly on reserves from other units, an indirect result of the scarcity of forces in relation to the terrain defended.

On August 9-10, 1/1 was unable to retake HILL 58A and hold it in two attempts. On August 11, a diversionary attack of 2/1 by tanks supported by an infantry platoon of 2/1 quickly achieved its mission: temporary capture of HILL 58A to draw Chinese forces away from effective defense of HILL 122.

The main attack on HILL 122 by a 2/1 company resulted in capture of HILL 122 in one and one-half hours. This force successfully withstood three small-scale counter-attacks. On August 12, CO 3/1 assumed command

of the BUNKER HILL defense. (His battalion held the MLR in this sector.) An enemy counterattack drove the Marines on HILL 122 to the reverse slope, causing heavy casualties. This position was then carefully organized, with the addition of I/3/1. Together, this Marine force repulsed two more night counterattacks and held, extending their defenses to HILL 122, as 3/1 strengthened its MLR with reserves. On August 13, a CCF counterattack on BUNKER HILL raging 4 hours was finally stopped by I/3/7. A second battalion-sized night attack was repulsed with the commitment into the battle of G/3/7.

On August 14, a fresh company (H/3/7) replaced B/1/1 on BUNKER HILL. That night a reinforced CCF company gained a small breakthrough in two small attacks, but could not exploit it. On August 15, a company-level probing attack was defeated. On August 16, a battalion-sized night attack on BUNKER HILL was withstood. The outcome was sufficiently uncertain at one point for CO 3/1 to alert a platoon of 3/1 for possible immediate recommitment to the hill. In all this fighting, maintenance of the OP line was essential to insure against a major effort to break through the thinly held MLR.

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ENGAGEMENT 32. BATTLE OF SUDONG, WITH COMMUNIST CHINESE ENCIRCLEMENT OF  
1ST BATTALION, 7TH MARINES, 1ST MARINE DIVISION, NOVEM-  
BER 2-5, 1950

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INTRODUCTION

This engagement describes the operations of the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, in a regimental-sized engagement against a reinforced regiment of the Chinese Communist Forces (CCF), consisting of a CCF night attack, a counterattack, and subsequent tank and infantry battle. This was the first battle with Chinese forces in the X Corps sector of eastern North Korea. The sections of this engagement report and their subject matter are:

• General Situation Before the Engagement

This summarizes the redeployment of the 1st Marine Division to Wonsan, plans for advance to the Yalu, the initial intervention of the CCF in Korea, characteristics of Chinese tactics, nature of the terrain, and the broad Division mission.

• Unit Background

This summarizes the organizing of 1/7 in California, and its prior combat experience from Seoul to Sudong.

• Pre-Engagement Operations

This explains the mission and force composition of the Marines and intelligence about the enemy on the eve of the engagement.

• The Engagement

This describes chronologically the battle actions of 1/7 and adjacent and supporting units in the fighting at Sudong, Chinhung-ni, and the approaches to Pohujang.

• After-Action Summary

This summarizes the actions and mission performance of 1/7, and the casualties on both sides during the engagement.

## GENERAL SITUATION BEFORE THE ENGAGEMENT

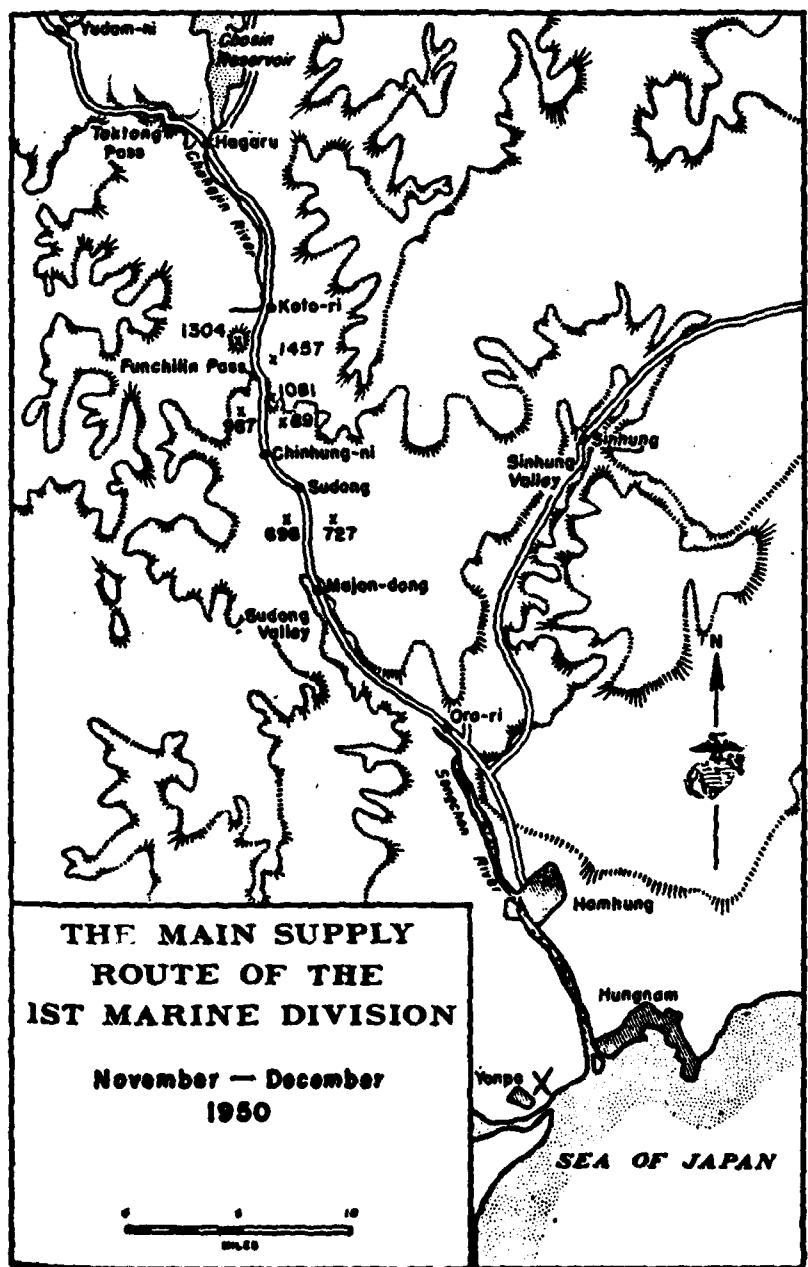
### The Advance Toward the Yalu

After the successful landing at Inchon and seizure of Seoul, the North Korean forces rapidly withdrew from the Pusan perimeter and retreated north of the 38th parallel. 1st Marine Division, after seizing Uijongbu, formed a blocking position southeast of Seoul which contributed to the rout of the North Korean forces. 1st Marine Division then moved by sea and made an administrative landing at Wonsan on October 26-27 and then began its rapid advance toward the Chosin Reservoir.

The Division came under the X Corps, which in turn reported directly to GHQ rather than to EUSAK. By the time the Division landed, troops of the ROK I Corps had captured Wonsan and moved north, while in the west U.S. and ROK forces were far north of Pyongyang, moving toward the Yalu. 1st Marine Division established its CP at Hungnam November 4 (see Map 1). Meanwhile, 5th and 7th Marines were advancing up the MLR toward Chosin Reservoir. Because of the rapid advance, Division units were spread far apart, the distances varying from 60 to 130 miles between the 1st Marines south of Hungnam and the other two regiments to the north. The 7th Marines reached Hanghun at the end of October, and were prepared to move north November 1.

### CCF Forces Intervene

The first and strongest CCF intervention occurred in northwest Korea late in October, an intervention which would on November 1 inflict heavy losses on the 1st Cavalry Division, then soon force Eighth Army to retreat below the 38th parallel. A patrol of 7th Marines first identified Chinese troops in eastern North Korea on October 31, near Sudong. The troops were identified by 26th ROK Regiment, forces which 7th Marines would soon relieve, as elements of two regiments of the 42d CCF Army. It had crossed the Yalu on October 16. 7th Marines patrols sought contact with the Chinese as far as 45 miles north of Hamhung, but located none.



MAP 1

### The Enemy

CCF tactics were in some respects unique. They almost always attacked at night. They used offensive-defensive tactics derived from guerrilla experience. In attacking, they used natural routes to get close to their enemy; when confronted they would deploy into small combat groups. These would advance in rushes, taking cover whenever fired upon, until close enough to make an all-out assault. They then would assault with rifles, machine guns and hand grenades, not relinquishing the attack even when taking heavy casualties. They were generally more effective in making penetrations than in exploiting them. However, the effect of many small penetrations could under some conditions disrupt an entire battalion. But their plan of maneuver was tightly controlled from battalion level, and smaller units seldom deviated from an overall plan, especially in following up success.

Concentrated for an offensive against X Corps were 9 divisions of the CCF 9th Army Group. (A Chinese division as composed for Korea had between 7,000 and 8,500 men.)

### The Terrain

The coastal plain of the Songchon estuary is a very spacious flatland. It covers 100 square miles, mostly consisting of rice paddies. Hamhung lies near the mouth of this river (Map 1). From this city, a narrow road and railroad lead into the rugged mountains to the north. From Hungnam to Yudam-ni this dirt and gravel road is 78 miles long. Sudong is 37 miles north of Hungnam, in rolling countryside, just south of the ascent into the rugged mountains.

### Mission

The 1st Marine Division mission, assigned on October 28, was to advance to Hungnam prepared to advance to the Manchurian border.

### UNIT BACKGROUND

1st Marine Division was commanded from the beginning of the Korean War by Major General Oliver P. Smith. The 7th Marines were formed at Camp Pendleton as the third of the Division's regiments, drawing in the case of 1/7 on active troops at Camp Lejeune, but heavily filled out with new recruits. The regiment landed at Inchon on September 21, six days after its assault by 1st and 5th Marines. This was less than a month after its activation. It saw its first combat at the Han River, and in the ensuing battle to surround and capture Seoul. It saw heavy action in the drive to Uijongbu. The unit then moved with the Division by sea to Wonsan, and after landing moved in convoy to Hungnam. 1/7 was commanded by Lieut. Col. Raymond G. Davis from its activation through the present engagement. The staff and company commanders also were with the unit that long.

### PRE-ENGAGEMENT OPERATIONS

#### Missions and Force Composition

The 7th Marines were to move to an assembly area between Oro-ri and Majondong, then relieve 26th ROK Regiment below Sudong. It moved out November 1, with the following attachments: 3rd Bn, 11th Marines, the Division Recon Co., Co. D, 1st Engineer Bn, 1st Motor Transport Bn, and minor detachments.

#### Intelligence of the Enemy and G-2 Assessment

Three divisions of the 42d CCF Army had been identified: 124th, 125th, and 126th. X Corps believed the forces in eastern North Korea were flank protection for those opposing Eighth Army, while the Division G-2 believed that a Chinese decision for full-scale intervention in this sector had not yet been made.

On November 1, the 26th ROK Regiment, in preparation for relief by 7th Marines, withdrew from positions just below Sudong to a road junction 4 miles to its south.

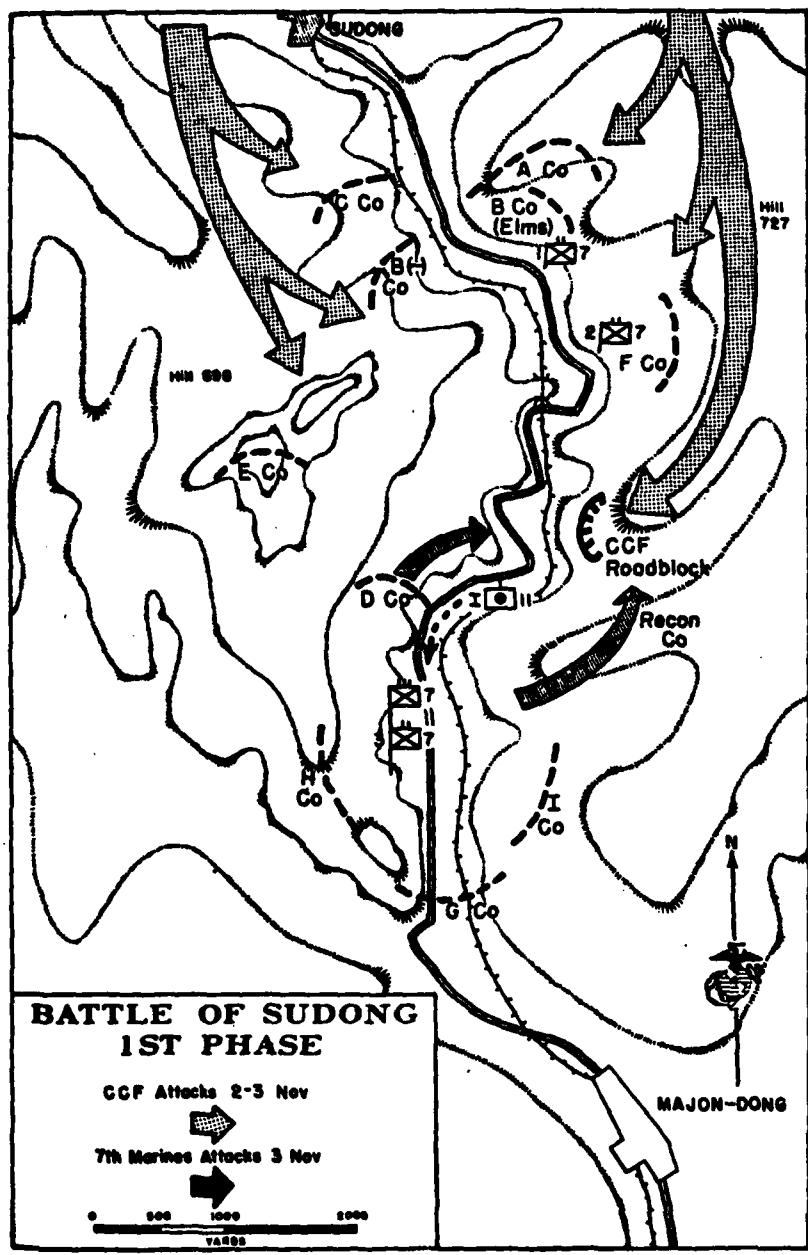
#### THE ENGAGEMENT

##### November 2

A CCF combat patrol struck the ROK regiment at 0600, in about 2-platoon strength, then retired after 30 minutes. The 7th Marines moved to effect a passage of lines, 1/7 in the lead in route column followed at 500 yards by 2/7, and covered by a close air support (CAS) squadron of CORSAIRS. The passage was without incident, and completed by 1030. 1/7 met the first CCF fires, delivered against Co. A from long range (Map 2). Battery G, 11th Marines went into firing position at noon, and this day fired 26 missions.

As 2/1 was responsible for holding the high ground near the MSR, D/2/7 moved up the south slope of HILL 698, relieving an ROK unit. It met moderate CCF fires, and a CAS flight strafed the ridge. At the top, this company met strong fires. Exhausted by the 1600' climb, it withdrew to the eastern slopes. At 2200, Co. E passed through and formed a defensive position for the night just below the crest. Meanwhile, the regiment advanced 3600 yards along the road, limiting the maximum length of the column to permit supporting artillery fire if needed. It was supported the rest of the day by heavy bombing of the surrounding hills. For the night, the Regiment deployed as shown in Map 2, with 1/7 the furthest north, on both sides of the MSR.

Unknown to the Marines, 371st CCF Regiment was massed to the north and west, and 370th CCF Regiment on the high ground east of the MSR. Co. A held HILL 532 (just east of the road) and the massive HILL 727, with its 3.5 inch rocket squad deployed along the road in case of tank attack. Two platoons of Co. C held the northeastern slope of HILL 698, while



MAP 2

the third platoon and the battalion 81mm mortars were placed behind Co. A. Co. B backed up Co. C's position on the left. 2/7 units were disposed with the Regiment's anti-tank (AT) and 4.2" mortar Cos. near the road just south of Co. F. 3/7 formed a perimeter further south protecting the regimental train. The general deployment was planned by the Regimental Commander, the specific deployments of 1/7 by the battalion CO.

At about midnight, two CCF battalions struck in a double-envelopment effort. By 0100, 1/7 and 2/7 were bending under this attack, which suddenly hit Cos. A and F on the east, and Co. B on the west (by-passing Co. C). The precise enemy objectives were not clear during the night, as they assaulted with grenades and submachine guns, and moved through gaps to the low ground near the road.

A T-34 tank rumbled up to Co. A CP catching the Marine road block napping (they thought it was a "friendly") and dispersed the Marines at the CP with tank fire. It then passed the CP of 1/7, examined the 81mm mortars with its headlights, then opened fire with its 85mm gun, but missed. It was then hit by a 3.5 inch rocket and a 75mm round from C/1/7 and the Regimental AT Co. However, the tank wiped out the AT crew before retreating north under fire.

Two platoons of Co. A, having suffered heavy casualties from infantry fire, withdrew to the 3rd platoon positions on the west flank of the hill at the spur. The CCF simultaneously hit the front and rear of the Co. B platoon farthest to the west, and cut it off when it tried to withdraw. CCF forces then swarmed over the valley, overrunning most of the 4.2" Mortar Co., and threatening both Bn CP's. Other Chinese infiltrated around E & F/2, entrenched at a road bend north of 3/7 (Map 2), and kept Co. I under pressure. During the night action, the course of 1/7 combat depended upon decisions of the company commanders, but redeployments to adjust the lines were handled by the Bn CO. By

dawn, both battalions were encircled. While the Marines held high ground to the north, the CCF held positions across the valley behind them.

November 3

At dawn, one company of Chinese dug in on high ground at the road bend, overlooking the Co. I positions to the east. On HILLS 698 and 727, Chinese were in force, with elements of the 371st Regiment now reinforced by a battalion of the 370th.

The CO, 7th Marines, employed his supporting arms. Two batteries of 3/11 had fired through the night. At 1100, Battery I/3/11 was extricated from an entrapped position near the road bend, and soon added its fires. 3/11 fired 1431 rounds this day, while constant air cover and frequent CAS were provided. The latter strafed the hill positions, bombed CCF artillery to the rear, and hit enemy positions with rockets. Much of the supporting fire, coordinated between Bn and Regimental CO's and the supporting artillery, was used to hit Chinese inside the Marine defense positions. By mid-morning, the low ground had been cleared of enemy, and by late afternoon the right flank of 1/7 and 2/7 had been restored.

That morning, E/2/7 recaptured HILL 698 in the face of a heavy grenade attack, killing 40. Toward the end of the day (1800), the CCF roadblock was knocked out by a plan developed by the CO, 7th Marines, using a 75mm recoilless rifle and part of the Division Reconnaissance Company. The Chinese withdrew from here into the hills to the east, leaving 28 dead. By dusk, the 7th Marines' perimeter was restored, with dispositions the same as the night before except that D/2/7 now held the ground east of the road bend. Only light CCF patrol action occurred this night.

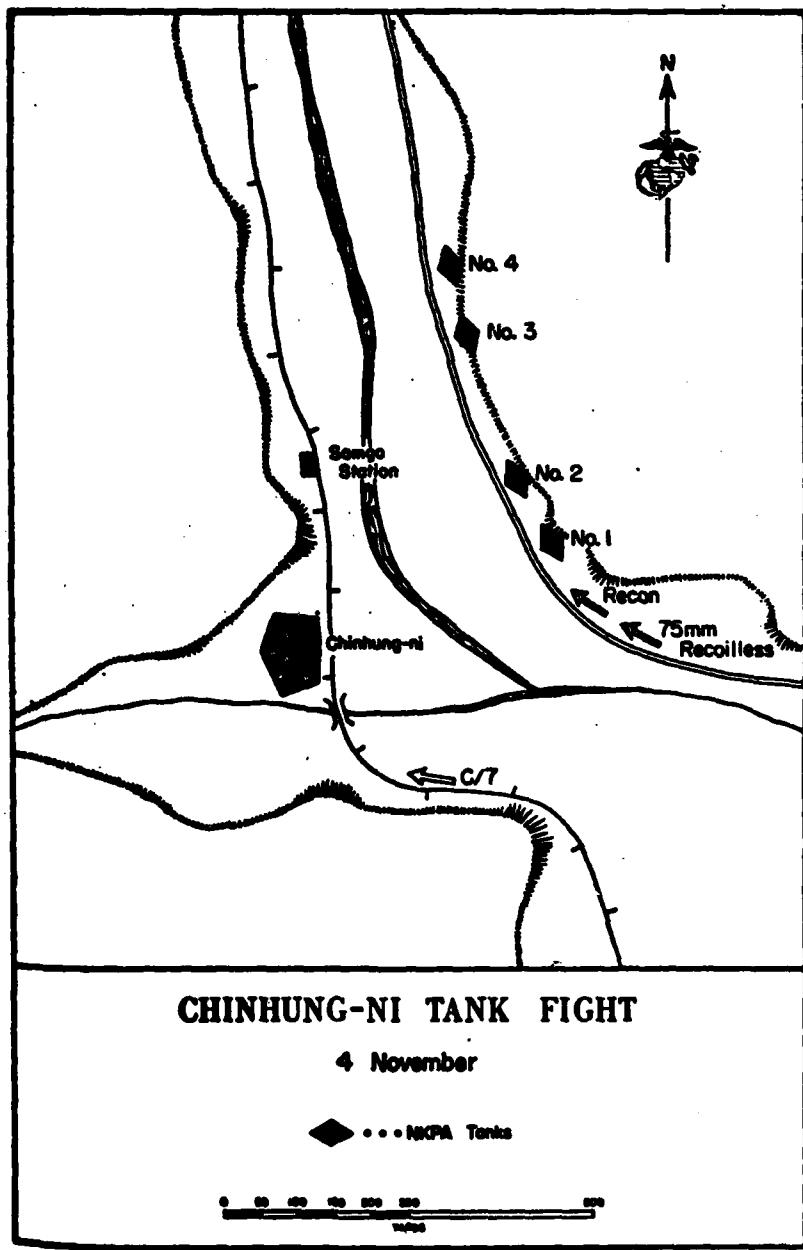
November 4

By now the Chinese had lost the equivalent of five companies out of two battalions of the 370th, an estimated 793 KIA, while 3/370 had lost two companies.

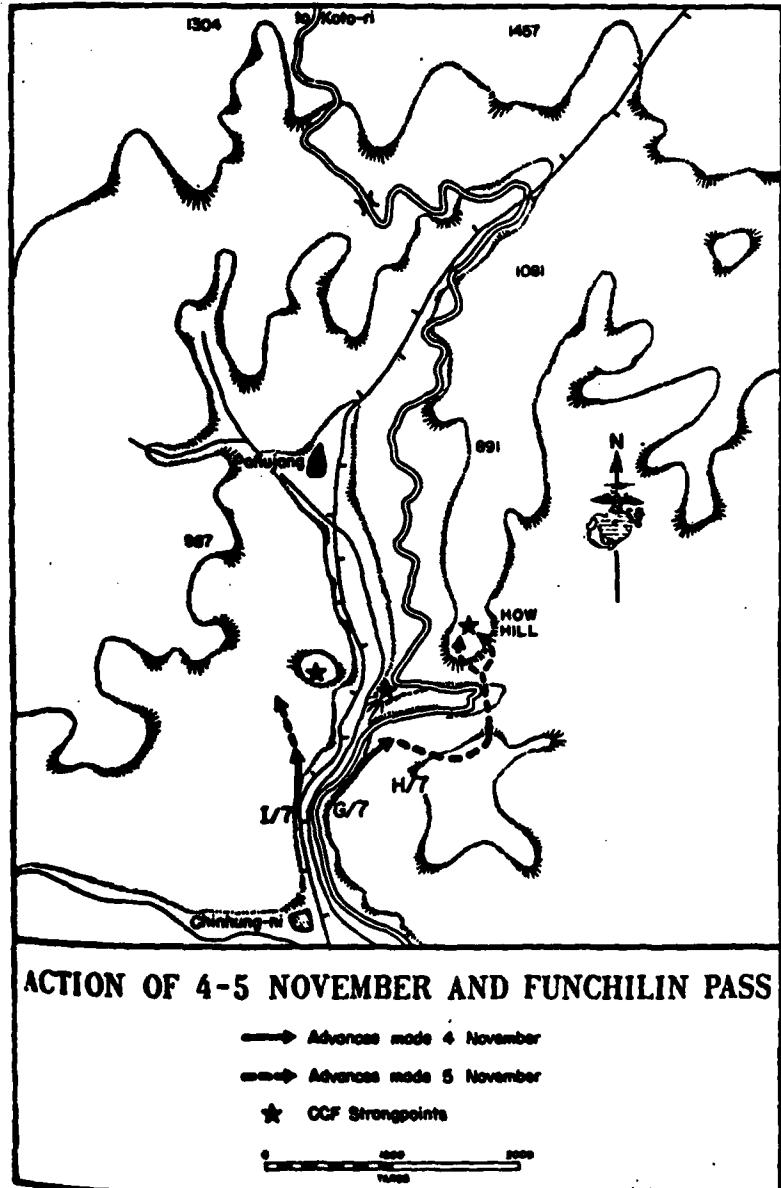
Now the 7th Marines were given the mission to capture Chinhung-ni. The remnants of the 124th CCF Division dug in on hills just north of that town, 6 miles beyond Sudong (Map 3). A depleted North Korean Tank Regiment, unable to fit through the pass there, took positions on the edge of the road and awaited the Marines' attack.

After 1/7 scouted the approaches to Sudong, the Regiment set out in march order, preceded by the Recon Co., with 2/7 left to protect the flanks. The Recon Co. fought a brief skirmish in Sudong with a Chinese platoon. At Chinhung-ni, they surprised a small force of Chinese at Samgo Station. These Marines passed the first hidden T-34 without noticing it. Fires of the Recon Co. scattered the Chinese at the station, alerting C/1/7, which was approaching the bridge. The Recon Co. now spotted the second tank, jumped on it as it moved, and dispatched the crew with grenades. The third tank sprang into action, and it was hit by 75mm recoilless rifle fire of the Recon Co, 3.5 inch rockets of C/1, and rockets of a CAS plane. The first tank was then discovered and destroyed, and the crew of the fourth tank surrendered as C/1/7 and the Recon Platoon destroyed the tank.

The CO, 7th Marines, deployed 1/7 on the flanks at Chinhung-ni. At this time, a Recon platoon was pinned down at the bend north of Chinhung-ni by fires from HILL 987 (Map 4). This night was quiet. Farther north, near Chosin Reservoir, night fighters strafed a large concentration of enemy truck convoys.



MAP 3



MAP 4

November 5

1/7 held the flanks, as 3/7 followed by 2/7 passed through the Recon Co. and attacked through Funchilin Pass. At 0700, a Recon platoon was pinned down at the pass. 3/7 passed through the high ground held by 1/7 on both sides of Chinhung-ni. 3/7 was struck by heavy infantry fires and made little progress. Now 3/11 delivered intense fires (943 rounds). The CCF fired 122mm mortars as counterbattery until the barrages of 3/11 silenced them. The Chinese suffered heavy losses to both artillery and air, but still held the hills below Pohujang (987 and 891) at dusk.

November 6

This afternoon, units of 2/7, heavily supported by 3/11, managed to envelop the CCF positions. Then the battalion was withdrawn into 3/7 lines, as the men were too exhausted to proceed. A new mission was assigned: capture Koto-ri. This night the remnants of 124th CCF Division withdrew from the area, having been rendered completely ineffective. This ends the engagement.

AFTER-ACTION SUMMARY

7th Marines (Reinforced) initially had the mission to advance to Hungnam, prepared to advance toward the Yalu. It was then assigned the specific mission to relieve an ROK regiment near Sudong. It was subsequently given missions to capture Sudong, then to capture Chinhung-ni, then Koto-ri. 1/7 played a major role at Sudong and an active role at Chinhung-ni. On the march it was the lead battalion prior to November 5.

On November 2, 7th Marines relieved the ROK Division, 1/7 taking the forward positions on the hills south of Sudong on both sides of the MSR. A CCF surprise night attack launched in two-battalion strength struck two companies of 1/7 and enveloped 1/7 and 2/7. The CCF inflicted heavy casualties on Co. A and drove two of its platoons from their positions,

cut off a platoon of Co. B, drove in the right flank of 2/7, and reached the lowland behind 1/7 and 2/7, temporarily cutting off both battalions. On November 3, heavy air and artillery support together with limited counterattacks by 1/7 and 2/7 caused heavy CCF casualties and restored the positions of the previous day.

On November 4 the CCF, having suffered heavy casualties, withdrew to positions on hills north of Chinhung-ni, leaving the remnants of a North Korean Tank Regiment to fight a desperate rearguard defense in which this unit was destroyed by a platoon of the Recon Company and elements of C/1/7.

This night and next day, 1/7 (-) deployed into the hills flanking Chinhung-ni to protect the flanks of the Regiment as it passed through the town and Funchilin Pass. On November 5, 3/7 passed through 1/7 and, enveloping the pass, managed to seize the high ground south of Pohujang. On the night of November 5, the 124th CCF Division withdrew, having been rendered militarily ineffective.

1/7 suffered moderate casualties in the CCF attack of November 2/3, except that heavy casualties occurred in Co. A. From November 3 on, 1/7 casualties were light. CCF casualties in all units, including those engaged by 1/7 were heavy the night of November 2 (inflicted by the infantry), and during daylight November 3 (inflicted mainly by artillery and air). Subsequent CCF casualties were light in 1/7's sector.

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ENGAGEMENT 33. BATTLE OF NORTHWEST RIDGE, YUDAM-NI, KOREA, INVOLVING ACTION  
OF 2ND BATTALION, 5TH MARINES, 1ST MARINE DIVISION, NOVEM-  
BER 27-NOVEMBER 28, 1950

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This engagement describes the operations of the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, and adjacent and supporting units in a two-regiment action involving a limited offensive, defense, counterattack, and disengagement and withdrawal, in face of the first major Communist Chinese Forces (CCF) offensive against X Corps. The sections of this engagement report and their subject matter are:

- General Situation Before the Engagement

This summarizes the Division advance to Yudam-ni, the successive Division and Regimental missions and operations prior to the engagement, the force composition and tactics of the CCF, and the terrain.

- Unit Background

This summarizes the organizing of the Division and 2/5, and battle experience of 2/5 before the engagement, and the experience of key personnel.

- Pre-Engagement Operations

This summarizes the missions and deployment of 5th and 7th Marines on the eve of the engagement.

- The Engagement

This describes chronologically the combat actions of 2/5 and adjacent and supporting elements in the first day's offensive, the succeeding night defensive fighting, a Marine counterattack, and the disengagement and withdrawal of 2/5 to new positions.

- After-Action Summary

This summarizes the missions and performance of 2/5, and provides an estimate of casualties.

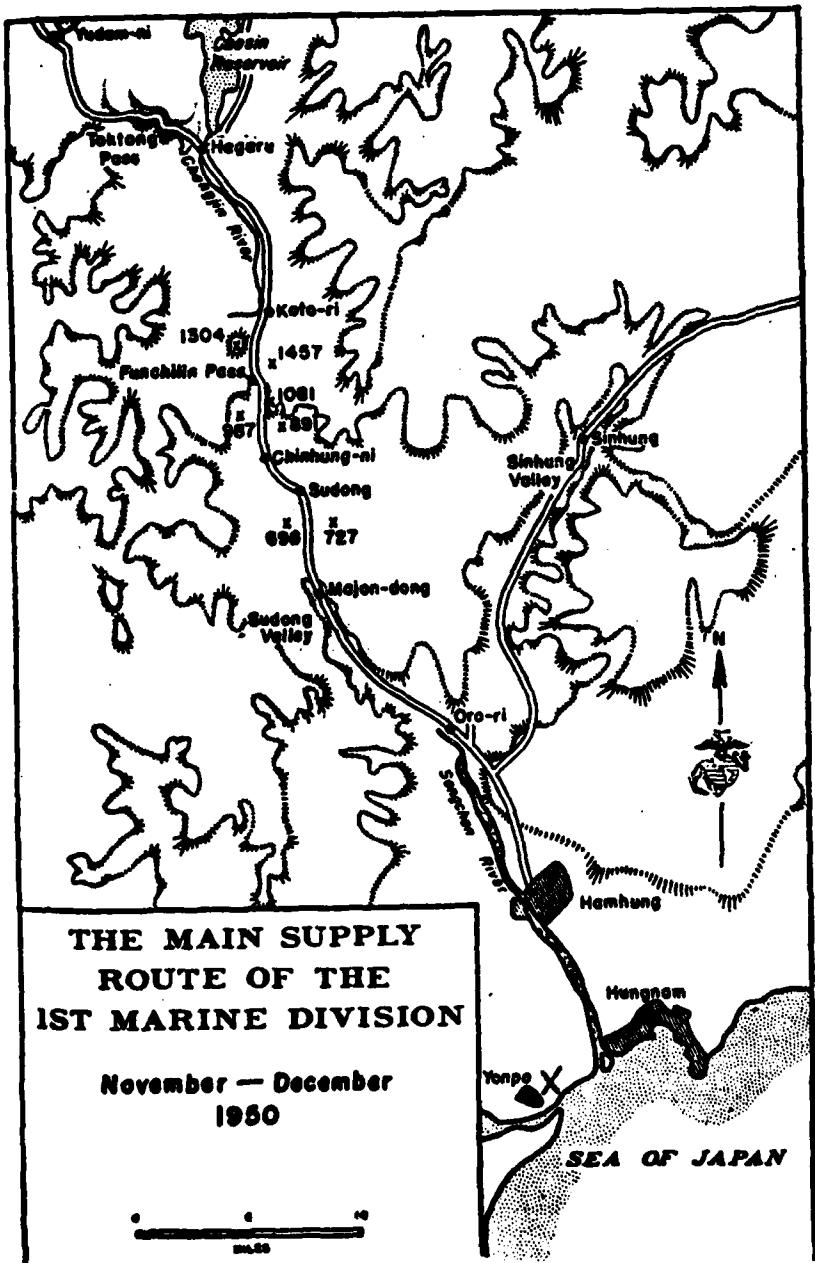
## GENERAL SITUATION BEFORE THE ENGAGEMENT

### The Advance Toward the Yalu

After the successful landing at Inchon and seizure of Seoul, the North Korean forces rapidly withdrew from the Pusan perimeter and retreated north of the 38th parallel. 1st Marine Division, after seizing Uijongbu, formed a blocking position southeast of Seoul which contributed to the rout of the North Korean forces. 1st Marine Division then moved by sea, made an administrative landing at Wonsan on October 26-27, and began its rapid advance toward the Chosin Reservoir.

The Division came under X Corps, which in turn reported directly to GHQ rather than to EUSAK. By the time the Division landed, troops of the ROK I Corps had captured Wonsan and moved north, while in the west U.S. and ROK forces were far north of Pyongyang, moving toward the Yalu. 1st Marine Division established its CP at Hungnam November 4 (see Map 1). Meanwhile, 5th and 7th Marines were advancing up the MSR toward Chosin Reservoir. Because of the rapid advance, Division units were spread far apart, the distances varying from 60 to 130 miles between the 1st Marines south of Hungnam and the other two regiments to the north. The 5th Marines on November 15 were ordered to pass through the 7th Marines at Hagaru and advance to Changjin via the east side of Chosin Reservoir. After an attempt by two CCF regiments to encircle 7th Marines at Sudong, the CCF disengaged and virtually all contact with them was lost in X Corps.

GHQ remained uncertain whether a full-scale Chinese commitment would occur, though by November 15 it had confirmed about 100,000 Chinese in North Korea, including 3 divisions opposite X Corps. The Corps Commander cautiously planned both an advance and sufficient measures for possible consolidation and defense to respond to an all-out CCF attack should it occur.



MAP 1

### First Mission

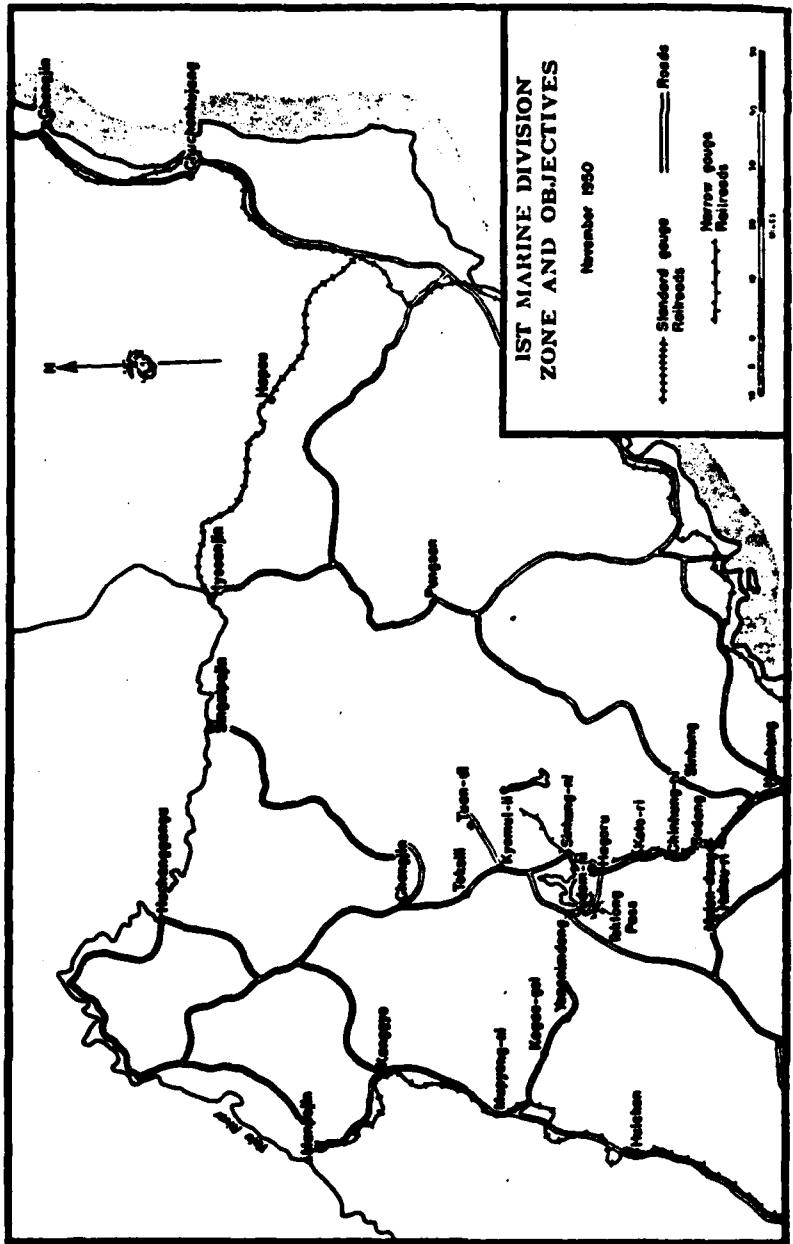
On November 11, he ordered an advance to the border, with I ROK Corps on the right, 7th Infantry Division in the center, and 1st Marine Division on the left. The Marines were ordered to be prepared on order to take up blocking positions at Huksu-ri and Yudam-ni (Map 2), then to advance to the Yalu. Because of CCF large-scale intervention on Eighth Army's front, X Corps about November 18 under GHQ direction adopted a new mission and plan. This was for the 5th Marine Division to drive west from Yudam-ni toward Mupyong-ni to cut the Chinese MSR. The 7th Infantry Division would protect the Marines' right flank at Changjin. At this point, 7th Marines were at Hagaru. The Division Commander ordered 7th Marines to take up a blocking position at Toktong Pass, south of Yudam-ni, because of his concern about a possible Chinese offensive.

### New Mission

While Hagaru was built up as a major base, 7th Marines, still at Hagaru, were ordered on November 23 to seize Yudam-ni, and maintain one battalion at that position, in addition to protecting the MSR from Yudam-ni to Chinhung-ni.

On November 23, Division ordered 5th Marines, then at Hagaru, to seize Kyolmul-ni, 20 miles northeast of Hagaru, and be prepared to seize Toksil-li and Tuan-di on order (respectively 10 and 15 miles beyond Kyolmul-li) (see Map 2). By November 24, all 3 battalions of the 5th had reached the northern end of the east side of Chosin Reservoir, and were in contact with Chinese patrols.

On November 23, 1st Marines were ordered to seize Yudam-ni. On November 25, the Division was ordered to attack west from Yudam-ni to Mupyong-ni, where the CCF were operating against Eighth Army. To this end, 5th Marines were relieved by a battalion of the 32d Infantry, and moved via Hagaru to Yudam-ni. 2/5, in the lead, would make the initial main effort west, once Yudam-ni was captured.



MAP 2

### CCF IN X CORPS SECTOR

The first CCF intervention occurred opposite Eighth Army, where first an ROK Division was involved in October, then the 1st Cavalry Division was heavily hit early in November. The 7th Marines fought its first engagement against the CCF November 1-5 at Sudong and Chinhung-ni. By November some 9 divisions of the CCF 9th Army Group were facing X Corps. One of these divisions (7000 to 8500 men) was rendered ineffectual in the Battle of Sudong.

CCF tactics were in some respects unique. They almost always attacked at night. They used offensive-defensive tactics derived from guerrilla experience. In attacking, they used natural routes to get close to their enemy. When confronted they would deploy into small combat groups. These would advance in rushes, taking cover whenever fired upon, until close enough to make an all-out assault. They then would assault with rifles, machine guns and hand grenades, not relinquishing the attack even when taking heavy casualties. They were generally more effective in making penetrations than in exploiting them. However, many small penetrations could under some conditions disrupt an entire battalion. Their plan of maneuver was tightly controlled from battalion level, and smaller units seldom deviated from an overall plan, especially in following up success.

### The Terrain and Weather

Winter had arrived early in Korea and by late November the mercury was dipping to 10 and 20 degrees below zero (F) during the night. It snowed frequently and ice covered the narrow, winding roads. The terrain near Yudam-ni was extremely mountainous, with many peaks over 5,000 feet high. The main road south of Yudam-ni wound along mountain slopes, and in many places there was a chasm on one side, a cliff on the other. West of Yudam-ni the main road wound through high steep hills which constituted a series of ridges running from north to south. Fighting

in this terrain and weather was very arduous for the Marines, as it also was for the Chinese who, dressed in padded cotton and lacking gloves, commonly suffered from frostbite.

#### UNIT BACKGROUND

1st Marine Division was commanded from the beginning of the Korean War by Major General Oliver P. Smith. 2/5, together with 1/5, fought at Pusan, as a two-company battalion under the Marine Provisional Brigade. The 3rd battalion was formed at Camp Pendleton in August. The 3 battalions joined for the Inchon landing, where 2/5 and 1/5 made the mainland assault on the town. 2/5 then fought in the capture of Kimpo Airfield, and the hills in the MLR on the outskirts of Seoul, and provided the protection of the Division flank north of Seoul.

The division then moved by sea to Wonsan. Once landed, 2/5 initially provided security for Wonsan while attached to the 1st Marines. Early in November, it rejoined its regiment, and moved rapidly north behind the 7th Marines via Hamhung to Oro-ri. From there, 2/5 was sent via Sinhung to the area around Fusen Reservoir, where it engaged in patrolling with little incident.

On November 13-14, 2/5 was moved to Koto-ri to relieve a 7th Marines unit which advanced to Hagaru. In all this patrol action, the battalion had fired a few shots, and captured 12 North Koreans and 1 Chinese. From here, it advanced with its Regiment through Hagaru and east of Chosin Reservoir, still meeting only enemy patrols. On November 26-27, it moved with its regiment to Yudam-ni.

Lieut. Col. Harold S. Roise had commanded the battalion throughout the war. Major John L. Hopkins became Executive Officer on November 22. All company commanders had served with the battalion since at least the

Inchon landing, except the Commander of H and S Co. who took command October 9, some six weeks before the engagement. By the time the battalion reached Yudam-ni, it had suffered slight to moderate casualties. 2nd Battalion, 11th Marines (artillery) had been supporting 5th Marines since Inchon. Its CO, Lieut. Col. Merritt Adelman, and the CO's of 2 of the firing batteries had also been with the unit since before Inchon. Battery F had had a new commander since November 20.

#### PRE-ENGAGEMENT OPERATIONS

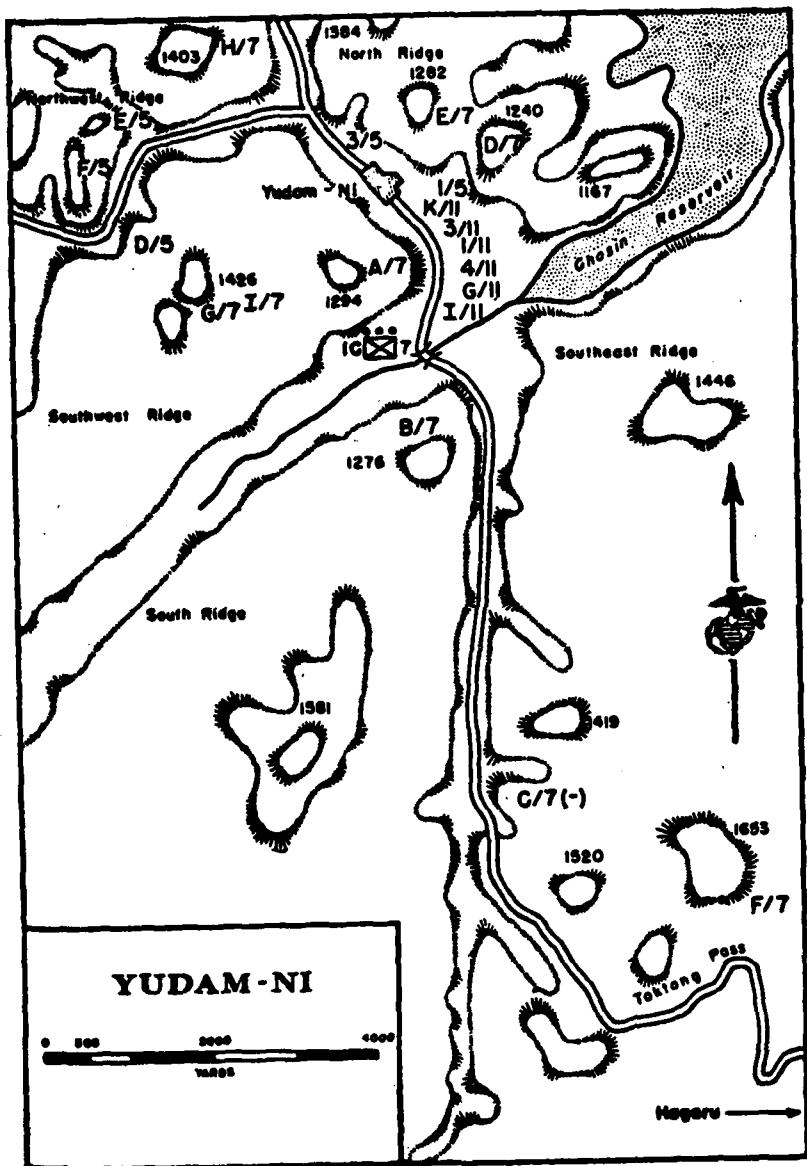
On November 23, 7th Marines started moving north from Toktong Pass, protected by patrols, and reached Yudam-ni without incident. At the same time, 5th Marines began its move around the reservoir, 2/5 in the lead, and this first unit reached Yudam-ni in the late afternoon of November 26.

The 5th Marines would pass through 7th Marines, once Yudam-ni was secured. While 7th Marines' mission would be to protect the MSR from Chinhung-ni to Yudam-ni, the 5th Marines would attack west from Yudam-ni to capture Yongnimdong, then Mupyong-ni (Map 2). By nightfall the 7th Marines were deployed in hills around Yudam-ni, with the 3 battalions of the 11th Marines in general support paralleling the road just to the south of the town. 2/5 was in an assembly position on the western edge of the town.

#### THE ENGAGEMENT

##### November 26

Yudam-ni lies in the middle of a broad valley surrounded by five great ridges (see Map 3) named, not surprisingly, NORTH, NORTHWEST, SOUTH WEST, SOUTH, and SOUTHEAST. The 7th Marines were disposed in a perimeter on the terminal hills of these ridges. H/3/7 was facing HILL 1403,



MAP 3

A-168

G/3/7 was in the valley of SOUTHWEST RIDGE east of HILL 1426, prepared to advance and protect the left flank of 2/5. 2/5 was making last preparations to advance west along the road, in the main effort, while 1/5 and 3/5 were beginning to close in on Yudam-ni.

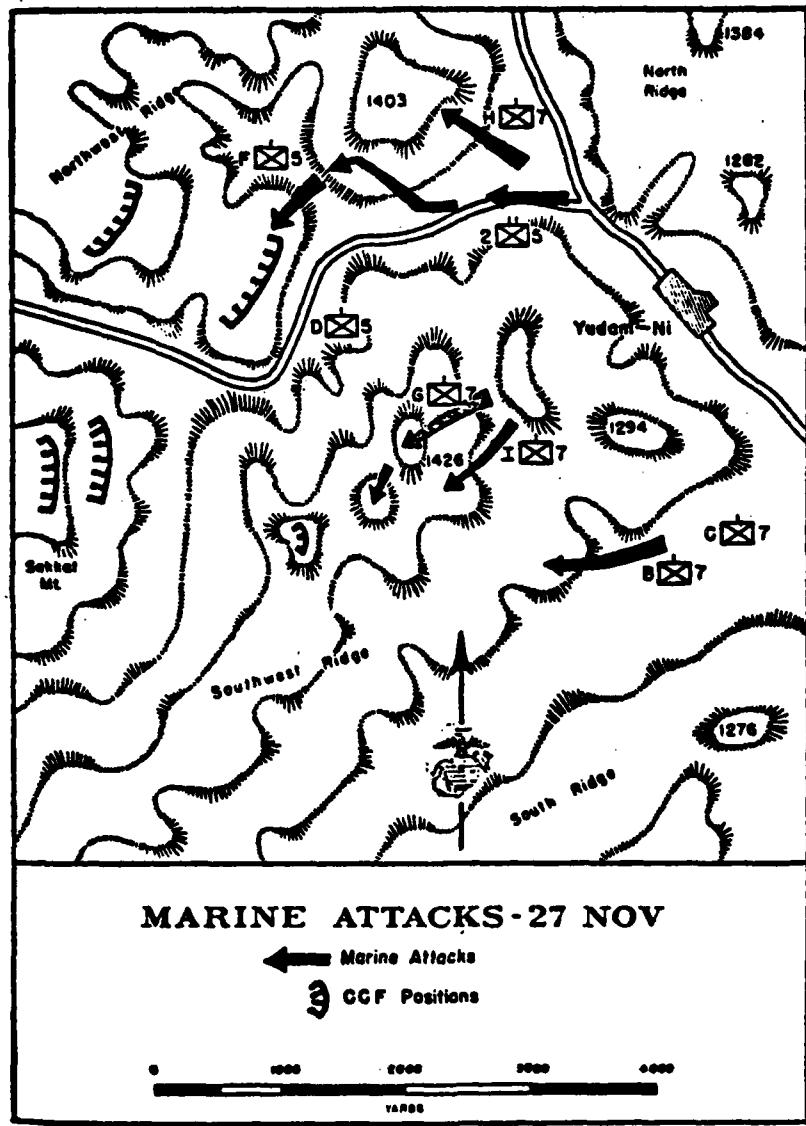
Missions

The CO, 7th Marines ordered 2/5 (at this time attached to the 7th) to move along the road out of Yudam-ni to a pass 10 miles to the west, its move to be supported by an advance of the 7th Marines along the ridge lines of NORTHWEST and SOUTHWEST RIDGE. The jumpoff would be at 0800 November 27. Specific supporting missions were assigned this night:

- 3/7 - advance along SOUTHWEST RIDGE and also seize HILL 1403 on NORTHWEST RIDGE.
- 2/7 - Cos. D and E to patrol NORTH RIDGE and the west coast of the reservoir.
- 1/7 - to scout SOUTH and SOUTHEAST RIDGES and adjoining corridors.

November 27

G/3/7 advanced to HILL 1426 in 30 minutes, then resumed the advance, where it came under fire from a peak 500 yards to the west (Map 4). At the same time, 2/5 advanced down the road to a bend beneath steep hills where it was to occupy a spur of NORTHWEST RIDGE flanking the road. F/2/5, advancing on the right of the road, was met with long-range small-arms fires from this spur. Now at 0945 a spotter plane identified Chinese positions all across the front. Co. F ascended the slope to the right and turned to advance Southwest across the spur at the road bend, supported by a mortar base of fire on the road. Co. D/2/5 was met with infantry fires as it moved down the road.



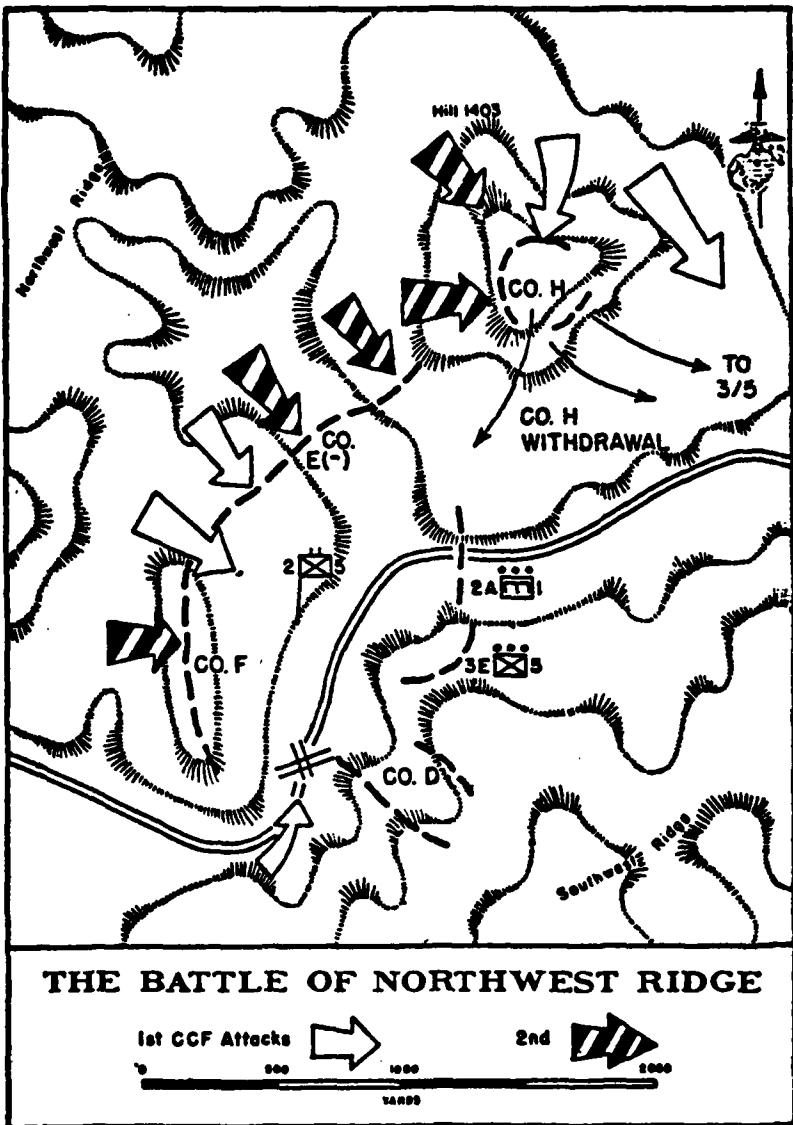
MAP 4

A-170

Close air support neutralized this CCF position. Then F/2/5 took it in enfilade, driving the Chinese to the west. At the same time, D/2/5 moved onto the ridge slope to the left of the road, and H/3/7 advanced to HILL 1423. D/2/5 now was approaching Sakkat Mountain. The strongly entrenched Chinese on these slopes forced 2/5 to deploy into a defensive position.

In the afternoon, 3/7 found progress costly. G/3/7 occupied a peak beyond HILL 1426 at 1500, from where it faced the CCF entrenchments on Sakkat mountain. Machine gun fire drove Co. G from this hill. Co. I was rushed forward to support Co. G (Map 4). B/1/7 joined the battle from the south flank. Now far to the north, a patrol of D/2/7 met enemy fire west of the reservoir (Map 3). It was becoming clear that the Chinese ringed Yudam-ni from the west around to the northeast. By dusk 2/5 occupied its initial objective. The Marines had advanced about 1500 yards. Had the CCF allowed 2/5 to advance to its next objective, they could have cut it off. 3/7 had advanced 1200 yards in most of its area, and 2000 yards where Co. H held an advanced position on HILL 1403 on the right flank of E/2/5.

Returning to Map 3, the Marine positions at dusk were: newly arrived 3/5 on a spur leading to HILL 1384; 1/5 arriving after dark bivouacked south of HILLS 1282 and 1240, forming a reserve behind 2/7. H/3/7 was on HILL 1403. E/2/5 held a blocking position to its left on NORTHWEST RIDGE with a 200-yard gap between. F/2/5 was to its left on a spur above the road. Across the road on NORTHWEST RIDGE, beyond supporting position for F/2/5, G and I/3/7 were on the topographic crest of SOUTHWEST RIDGE, with D/2/5 and a platoon of E/2/5 holding the spur just south of the road (Map 5). Two-thousand yards to its rear, A/1/7 held HILL 1294. (These hills were from 1,000 to 2,000 feet above the town.) SOUTH RIDGE was held by 1/7. Three-fourths of the pieces of 11th Marines (30 105mm and 18 155mm Howitzers) were deployed just south of Yudam-ni, in the lowlands. The regiment was short of rations and ammunition. It received 5 truck-loads this night, the last supplies to get through.



MAP 5

After dark, many of the BAR's and carbines refused to function in the cold, while some M-1's proved recalcitrant. The Marines awaited an expected attack. Now Chinese troops moved silently toward the southern tips of NORTH and NORTHWEST RIDGES. These were the assault battalions of 79th and 89th CCF Divisions. Meanwhile, 59th CCF Division made a wide envelopment, to cut in at SOUTH RIDGE and Toktong Pass.

By 2100, the Chinese troops were within a few hundred yards of the 2/5 companies (E and F) and H/3/7 (see Map 5), still undetected. Now they probed the lines of F/2/5, and at about 2115 assaulted with grenades and a heavy mortar barrage. Masses of Chinese were killed, then they broke through between the two companies. Here they were cut down by infantry fires. Helped by the illumination from the blaze of a hut, 2/5 virtually annihilated the attackers. At 2135, the Chinese attacked the exposed H/3/7 from three sides. The right flank collapsed under the CCF numbers. A 60mm mortar section was overrun, and the survivors made their way to the lines of 3/5 in the valley. Supporting fires from the valley blocked this breakthrough, as the CO reorganized his platoons.

The CO was killed in a counterattack. The CO 3/7 sent a lieutenant to take command. At midnight, when he reached the company, he found all but one officer wounded, and the company badly depleted. He moved the strongest platoon to bolster the right flank. After an hour's lull, the CCF attacked H/3/7 and E/2/5 with a fresh battalion at 0300. H/3/7 held off a massed CCF attack one hour. Then the CO began withdrawing the company, too thin to hold the position longer. First it withdrew behind E/2/5, which held the low ground to the left of the Hill. By 0600, under orders of CO 3/7, it had withdrawn within a valley position now held by 3/5 just west of Yudam-ni.

E/2/5 was hit between 0300-0400, while H/3/7 was starting to give way, by about 300 Chinese. The Chinese attacked frontally, and were mowed down. A new wave of CCF, deterred by the dead in front of them, engaged

Co. E in a long-range exchange of MG and mortar fire. To the left of Co. E, Co. F was struck by about 200 Chinese at the spur overlooking the road. They made repeated thrusts at its center. Co. F suffered heavy casualties, and the CCF overran 2 MG positions. In sporadic fighting the rest of the night, Co. F held its ground. 2/5's losses this night were, surprisingly, only 7 KIA, 25 WIA, and 25 frostbite casualties. This same night, a heavy battle occurred on NORTH RIDGE involving 1/5 and 3/5.

November 28

By dawn the Chinese held much of the high ground of NORTHWEST RIDGE overlooking Yudam-ni. The withdrawal of H/3/7 from HILL 1403 had exposed not only the right flank and rear of E/2/5, but the rear of Marines holding NORTH RIDGE. Its fires could enfilade Marines throughout the valley. CO 2/5 recognized the danger to his flank. At 0600, he ordered Co. E to counterattack. It drove the Chinese from a spur to the left (south) of HILL 1403. At 0800, Co. F attacked, recaptured the MG's it had lost, and killed 15 Chinese in its rear area, while Co. E blocked a flanking counterattack on its right.

Meanwhile, plans to continue the planned regimental strength attack were cancelled before dawn, and CO 2/5 was ordered to prepare plans for a possible withdrawal to SOUTHWEST RIDGE. CO 2/5, preoccupied on his own front, was surprised, and questioned the decision to cease the westward attack. At dawn, the two Regimental Commanders decided to cancel the attack and take up defensive positions. At 1100, the CO 5th Marines ordered 2/5 to withdraw to SOUTHWEST RIDGE, and tie in with 3/7. The CG confirmed this, and ordered 7th Marines to prepare for an attack south to clear the MSR, which was by now cut in many places, as far as Hagaru.

The CO's of the 5th and 7th Marines now prepared a joint plan to defend Yudam-ni, then break out to Hagaru. In support of the joint defense

and breakout plans, 2/5 early in the afternoon withdrew, one company at a time, to SOUTHWEST RIDGE, with Co. E serving as rearguard. The battalion received only harassing fires, and the move was completed by 2200. The 5th Marines were now responsible for all defenses to the west and north. This night was quiet, as the CCF prepared for a co-ordinated effort to cut off the two regiments in the area between Yudam-ni and Toktong Pass.

#### AFTER-ACTION SUMMARY

This action was characterized by an initial Marine offensive by a reinforced regiment, with 2/5 in the main effort, then a strong CCF counterattack, and finally a battalion disengagement and withdrawal to a new defense line, within the context of a 2-regiment plan to consolidate defenses, withdraw, and then break out.

On November 27, 2/5 moved west, deployed into hills on 2 sides of the route of advance, seized a ridge line, and tied in to 3/7 on its left. This night Cos. E and F withstood heavy repeated counterattacks, in which they gave, then recovered some ground, and inflicted heavy casualties. On November 28, these two companies counterattacked and advanced slowly in the morning, as Co. D held its position linking 2/5 to 3/7. This afternoon, in accordance with joint-regimental plans, 2/5 disengaged successfully from NORTHWEST RIDGE, and deployed on SOUTHWEST RIDGE, as a first step in the planned breakout of the 2 regiments to Hagaru.

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ENGAGEMENT 34. BATTLE OF YUDAM-NI, KOREA, INVOLVING ACTION OF 3RD BATTALION, 7TH MARINES, NOVEMBER 27-DECEMBER 4, 1950

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This engagement describes the operations of the 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines, and adjacent and supporting units in a two-regiment action involving a limited offensive, a hasty defense, and disengagement and withdrawal during the first major Communist Chinese Forces (CCF) offensive against X Corps. The sections of this engagement report and their subject matter are:

- General Situation Before the Engagement

This summarizes the Division advance to Yudam-ni, first CCF contact at Sudong, the successive Division missions prior to the engagement, the force composition and tactics of the CCF, and the terrain.

- Unit Background

This summarizes the organizing of the Division and 3/7, the battle experience of 3/7 before the engagement, and the experience of their personnel.

- Pre-Engagement Operations

This summarizes the mission and deployment on the eve of the engagement.

- The Engagement

This describes chronologically the combat actions of 3/7 and adjacent and supporting elements in the first day's offensive, the succeeding defensive fighting, and the disengagement and withdrawal of 3/7.

- After-Action Summary

This summarizes the missions and performance of 3/7 day by day, and provides an estimate of casualties.

## GENERAL SITUATION BEFORE THE ENGAGEMENT

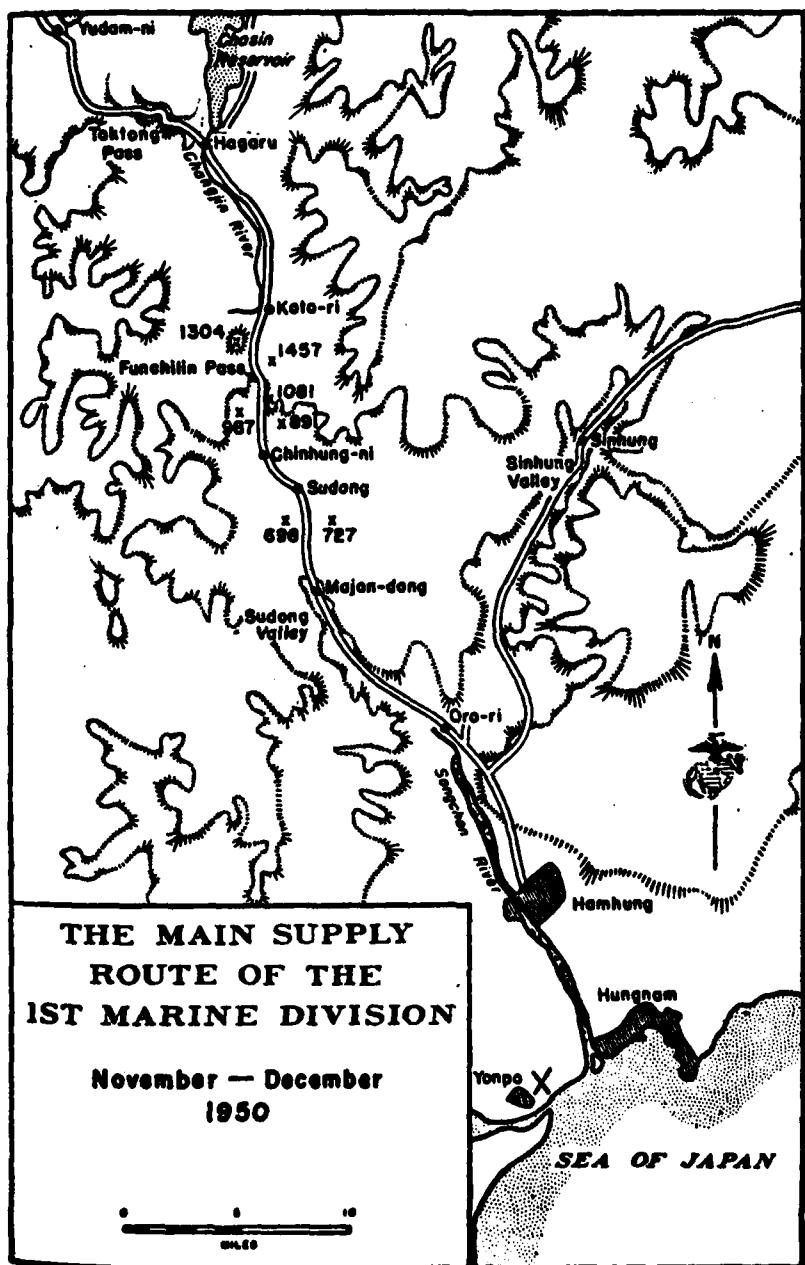
### The Advance Toward the Yalu

After the successful landing at Inchon and seizure of Seoul, the North Korean forces rapidly withdrew from the Pusan perimeter and retreated north of the 38th parallel. 1st Marine Division, after seizing Uijongbu, formed a blocking position southeast of Seoul which contributed to the rout of the North Korean forces. 1st Marine Division then moved by sea and made an administrative landing at Wonsan, on October 26-27, and then began its rapid advance toward the Chosin Reservoir.

The Division came under X Corps, which in turn reported directly to GHQ rather than to EUSAK. By the time the Division landed, troops of the ROK I Corps had captured Wonsan and moved north, while in the west U.S. and ROK forces were far north of Pyongyang, moving toward the Yalu. 1st Marine Division established its CP at Hungnam on November 4 (Map 1). Meanwhile, 5th and 7th Marines were advancing up the MSR toward Chosin Reservoir. Because of the rapid advance, Division units were spread far apart, the distances varying from 60 to 130 miles between the 1st Marines south of Hungnam and the other two regiments to the north.

The 7th Marines reached Hangnum at the end of October, and prepared to move north November 1. Then, after an attempt by two CCF regiments to encircle 7th Marines at Sudong, the CCF disengaged. By November 7, all Chinese forces in the X Corps sector had vanished.

GHQ remained uncertain whether a full-scale Chinese commitment would occur, though by November 15 it had confirmed about 100,000 Chinese in North Korea, including 3 divisions opposite X Corps. The Corps Commander cautiously planned both an advance and sufficient measures for possible consolidation and defense to respond to an all-out CCF attack should it occur. On November 11, he ordered an advance to the border, with



MAP 1

I ROK Corps on the right, 7th Infantry Division in the center, and 1st Marine Division on the left. The Marines were ordered to be prepared on order to take up blocking positions at Huksu-ri and Yudam-ni (Map 2), then to advance to the Yalu.

Because of CCF large-scale intervention on Eighth Army's front, X Corps about November 18 under GHQ direction adopted a new mission and plan. This was for 1st Marine Division to drive west from Yudam-ni toward Mupyong-ni to cut the Chinese MSR. 7th Infantry Division would protect the Marines' right flank at Changjin. At this point, 7th Marines were at Hagaru. The Division Commander ordered 7th Marines initially to take up a blocking position at Toktong Pass, south of Yudam-ni, because of his concern about a possible Chinese offensive.

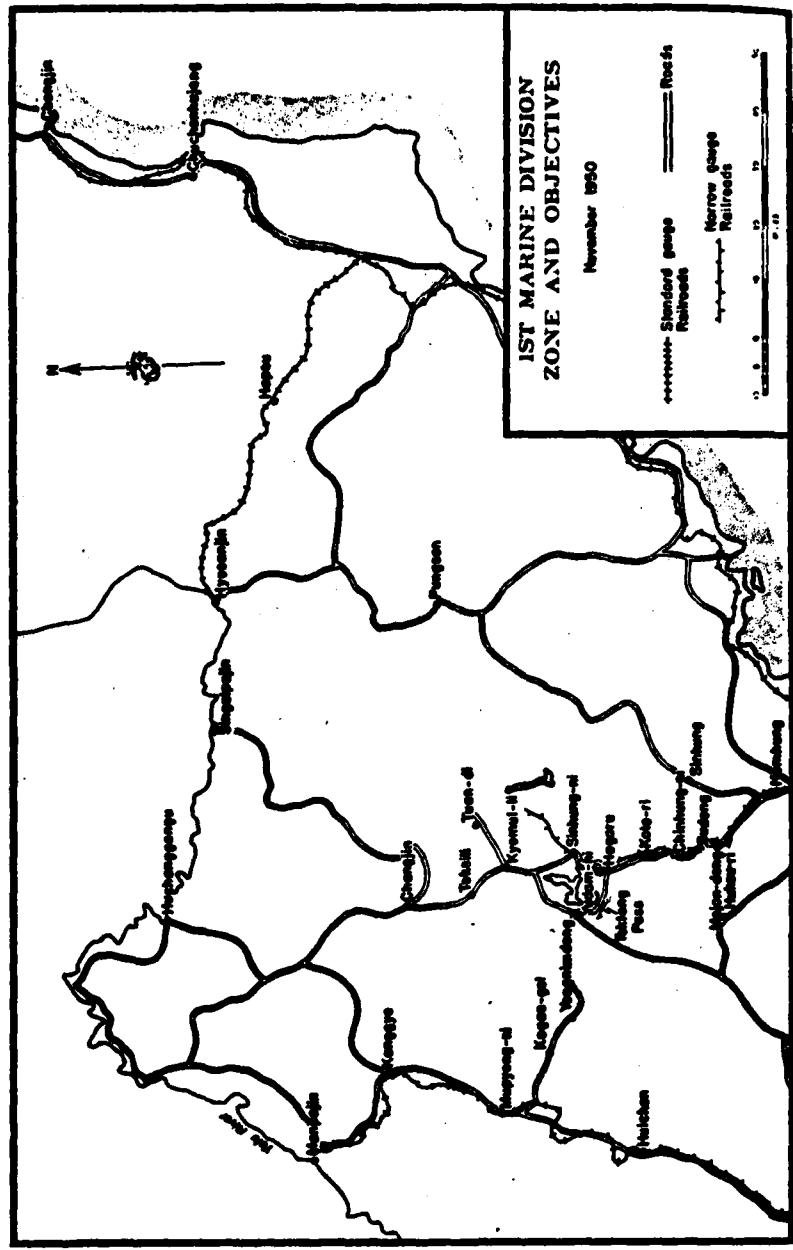
#### Mission Modification

While Hagaru was built up as a major base, 7th Marines, still now at Hagaru, were ordered on November 23 to seize Yudam-ni, and maintain one battalion at that position. By November 24, advance elements of the 5th Marines were operating east of Chosin Reservoir, where they soon had limited contact with Chinese patrols.

#### CCF in X Corps Sector

The first CCF intervention occurred opposite Eighth Army, where first an ROK Division was mauled in October, then the 1st Cavalry Division was heavily hit early in November. The 7th Marines fought their first engagement against the CCF November 1-5 at Sudong and Chinhung-ni. By November, 9 divisions of the CCF 9th Army Group were facing X Corps. One of these divisions (7000 to 8500 men) was rendered ineffectual in the Battle of Sudong.

CCF tactics were in some respects unique. They almost always attacked at night. They used offensive-defensive tactics derived from guerrilla



MAP 2

experience. In attacking, they used natural routes to get close to their enemy; when confronted they would deploy into small combat groups. These would advance in rushes, taking cover whenever fired upon, until close enough to make an all-out assault. They then would assault with rifles, machine guns, and hand grenades, not relinquishing the attack even when taking heavy casualties. They were generally more effective in making penetrations than in exploiting them. However, many small penetrations could under some conditions disrupt an entire battalion. Their plan of maneuver was tightly controlled from battalion level, and smaller units seldom deviated from an overall plan, especially in following up success.

#### The Terrain and Weather

Winter had arrived early in Korea and by late November the mercury was dipping to 10 and 20 degrees below zero (F) during the night. It snowed frequently and ice covered the narrow, winding roads. The terrain near Yudam-ni was extremely mountainous, with many peaks over 5,000 feet high. The main road south of Yudam-ni wound along mountain slopes, and in many places there was a chasm on one side, a cliff on the other. This made it impossible for vehicles to circumvent roadblocks and also made the road quite vulnerable to an enemy ensconced on the neighboring heights. Fighting in this terrain and weather was very arduous for the Marines, as it also was for the Chinese who, dressed in padded cotton and lacking gloves and sturdy shoes, commonly suffered from frostbite.

#### UNIT BACKGROUND

1st Marine Division was commanded from the beginning of the Korean War by Major General Oliver P. Smith. The 7th Marines were formed at Camp Pendleton as the third of the Division's regiments, drawing in the case of 3/7 on troops at sea in the Mediterranean, heavily filled out later with new recruits. The regiment landed at Inchon on September 21, six days after its assault by 1st and 5th Marines. This was less than a

month after its activation. 3/7 saw its first combat at the Han River and the ensuing battle to surround and capture Seoul. It saw heavy action in the drive to Uijongbu. The unit then moved with the Division by sea to Wonsan, and after landing moved in convoy to Hungnam. 3/7 saw action at Sudong and made the main effort to capture the hill approaches to Pohujang before moving to Hagaru.

The battalion had been commanded since November 11 by Lieut. Colonel William F. Harris; as the previous commander, Major Maurice E. Roach had been reassigned to the regimental staff. All Company Commanders but one had been with the battalion since the beginning. 1st Lieutenant William E. Johnson took over command of Co. I on October 15, while 2 CO's (Capt Thomas E. Cooney and Capt. Leroy M. Cooke) were killed in the present engagement. Cooke had commanded since November 12. By the time the battalion reached Toktong Pass, it had suffered moderate casualties. 3rd Bn 11th Marines (artillery) had been supporting 7th Marines since Inchon. Its CO, Major Francis F. Parry, and the CO's of all firing batteries had also been with the unit since before Inchon.

#### PRE-ENGAGEMENT OPERATIONS

By November 24, all three battalions of 5th Marines were operating east of Chosin Reservoir. On November 23, 7th Marines moved north along the MSR from Toktong Pass, 1/7 leading, followed by 3/7. At the same time, 5th Marines were replaced east of Chosin Reservoir by the 31st Infantry, and they moved around the reservoir, preparing to pass thru 7th Marines when Yudam-ni was captured. 7th Marines' mission after being passed through would be to protect the MSR from Chinhung-ni to Yudam-ni. By November 26, 7th Marines were deployed just south of Yudam-ni, and 2/5 had deployed to its rear.

#### THE ENGAGEMENT

Yudam-ni lies in the middle of a broad valley surrounded by five great ridges named, not surprisingly, North, Northwest, Southwest, South,

and Southeast (Map 3). The 7th Marines were disposed in a perimeter on the terminal hills of the ridges, with D&E/2/7 (attached to 1/7) on NORTH RIDGE, 3/7 on SOUTHWEST RIDGE, and 1/7 on SOUTH and SOUTHEAST RIDGES. 3/7 overlooked the route of the planned 5th Marines advance westward.

November 26

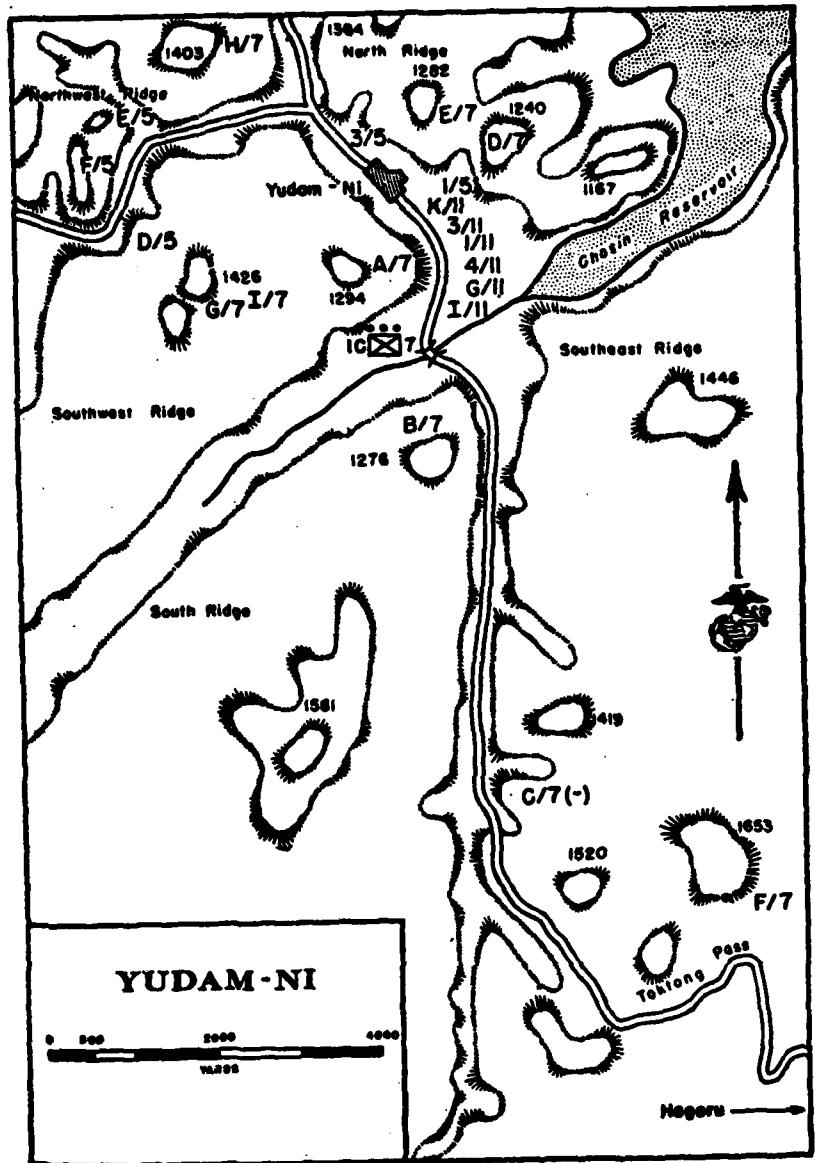
The 7th Marines CO ordered 2/5 (at this time attached to the 7th) to move along the road out of Yudam-ni to a pass 10 miles to the west, its move to be supported by an advance of the 7th Marines along the ridge lines of NORTHWEST and SOUTHWEST RIDGE. The jump-off would be at 0800 November 27.

Specific missions were assigned this night:

- 3/7 - advance along SOUTHWEST RIDGE and also seize HILL 1403 on NORTHWEST RIDGE.
- 2/7 - Cos. D&E to patrol NORTH RIDGE and the west coast of the reservoir.
- 1/7 - to scout SOUTH and SOUTHEAST RIDGES and adjoining corridors.

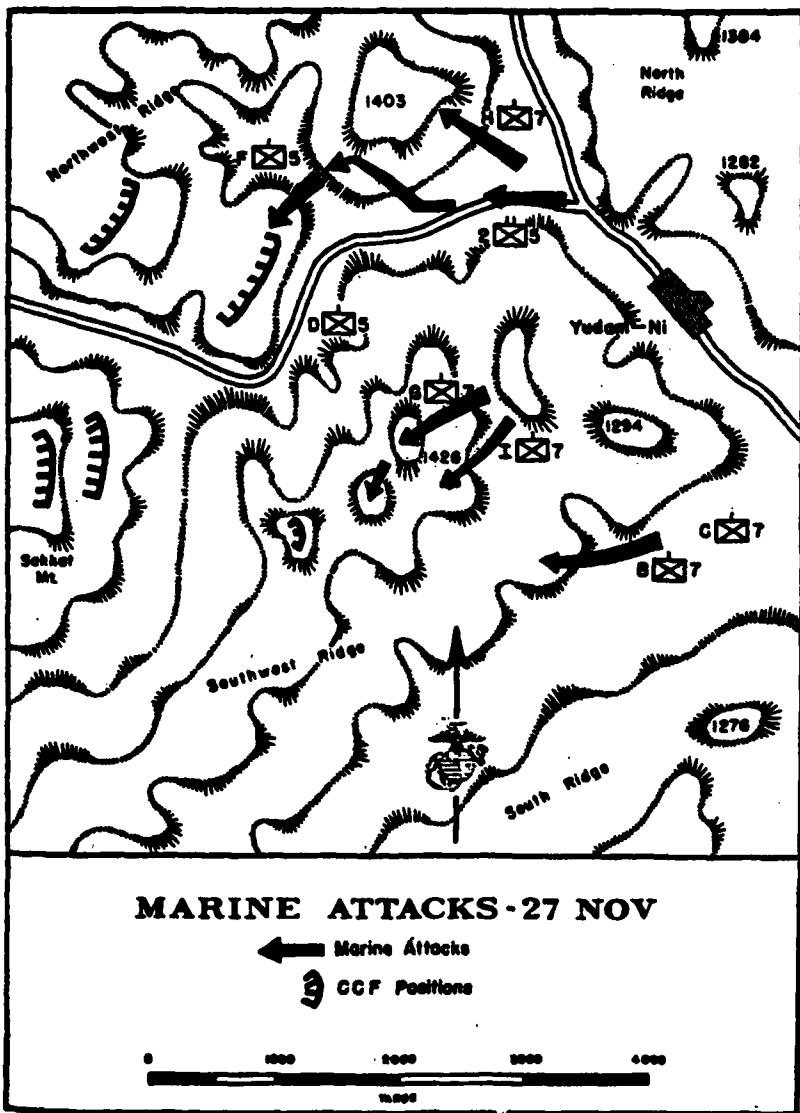
November 27

G/3/7 advanced to HILL 1426 in 30 minutes, then resumed the advance when it came under fire from a peak 500 yards to the west (Map 4). At the same time, 2/5 advanced down the road to a bend beneath steep hills, where it was to occupy a spur of NORTHWEST RIDGE flanking the road. Co. F, advancing on the right of the road, was met with long-range small-arms fires from this spur. At 0945 a spotter plane identified Chinese positions all across the front. Co. F ascended the slope and turned to advance toward 3/7 supported by a mortar base of fire on the road. D/5 was met with infantry fires. Close air support (CAS) bombing neutralized this CCF position, then F/2/5 took it in enfilade, driving



MAP 3

A-184



MAP 4

the Chinese to the west. D/2/5 now approached Sakkat Mountain along the road. The strongly entrenched Chinese on these slopes forced 2/5 to break off this action.

In the afternoon, 3/7 found progress costly. G/3/7 occupied a peak beyond HILL 1426 at 1500, from where it faced the CCF entrenchments on Sakkat Mountain. Machine gun fire drove Co. G from this hill. I/3/7 was rushed forward to support Co. G (Map 4). B/1/7 joined the battle from the south flank. Far to the north, a patrol of D/2/7 met enemy fire west of the reservoir (Map 3). It was becoming clear that the Chinese ringed Yudam-ni from the west around to the northeast. By dusk the Marines had advanced about 1500 yards in 2/5's zone, where 2/5 occupied its initial objective. Had 2/5 been allowed by the CCF to advance to its next objective, the CCF could have cut it off. 3/7 had advanced 1200 yards in most of its area, and 2000 yards where Co. H held an advanced position on Hill 1403.

Returning to Map 2, the Marine positions at dusk were: newly arrived 3/5 on a spur leading to HILL 1384; 1/5 arriving after dark bivouacked south of HILLS 1282 and 1240, forming a reserve behind 2/7. H/3/7 was on HILL 1403. E/2/5 held a blocking position to its left with a 200-yard gap in between. F/2/5 was to its left on a spur above the road. Across the road on NORTHWEST RIDGE, beyond supporting position for F/2/5, G/3/7 and I/3/7 were on the topographic crest of SOUTHWEST RIDGE, with D/2/5 holding the forward slope of HILL 1426. A/1/7 held HILL 1294. (These hills were from 1,000 to 2,000 feet above the town.) SOUTH RIDGE was held by two companies of 1/7. Two companies of 2/7 were strung out on the road to Hagaru. Three-fourths of the pieces of 11th Marines (30 105mm and 18 155mm Howitzers) were deployed just south of Yudam-ni, in the lowlands. The regiment was short of rations and ammunition. It received 5 truckloads this night, the last supplies to get through.

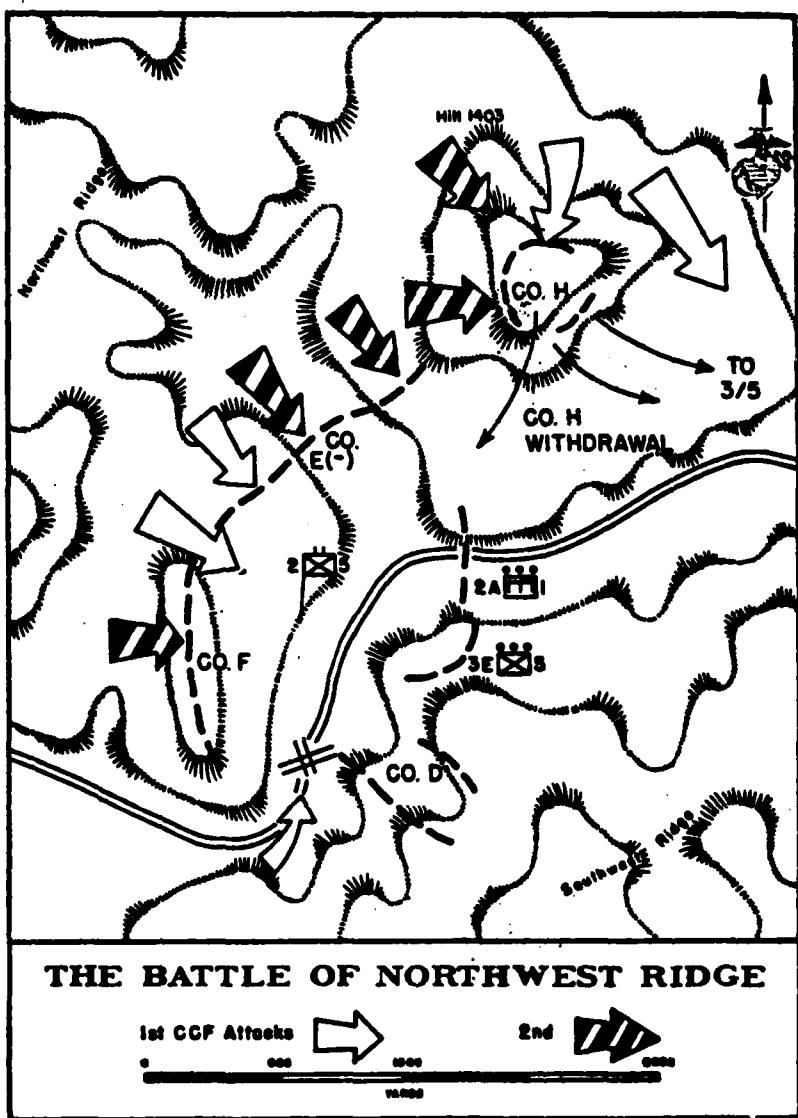
After dark, many of the BAR's and carbines refused to function in the cold, while some M-1's proved recalcitrant. The Marines awaited an expected attack. Now Chinese troops moved silently toward the southern

tips of NORTH and NORTHWEST RIDGES. These were the assault battalions of 79th and 89th CCF Divisions. Meanwhile, 59th CCF Division made a wide envelopment, to cut in at SOUTH RIDGE and Toktong Pass.

By 2100, the Chinese troops were within a few hundred yards of the 2/5 companies and H/3/7 (Map 5) still undetected. They probed the lines of E/2/5, and at about 2115 assaulted with grenades and a heavy mortar barrage. Masses of Chinese were killed; then they broke through between E and F/2/5. These were cut down by infantry fire. Helped by the light from a burning hut, 2/5 virtually annihilated the attackers. At 2135, the Chinese attacked the exposed H/3/7 from three sides. The right flank collapsed under the CCF numbers. A 60mm mortar section was overrun, and the survivors made their way to the lines of 3/5 in the valley. Supporting fires from the valley blocked this breakthrough, as the CO reorganized his platoons.

The CO, Captain Leroy M. Cooke, led a counterattack which restored the right flank. He was killed in this action. The CO 3/7, whose CP was in Yudam-ni, sent 1st Lieutenant Howard H. Harris, just returned to duty after being wounded, to take command. At midnight, he reached the company. He found all but one officer wounded, and the company badly depleted. He moved the strongest platoon to bolster the right flank. After an hour's lull, the CCF attacked H/3/7 and E/2/5 with a fresh battalion at 0300. Harris held off a massed CCF attack for one hour. Then he began withdrawing the company, too thin to hold the position longer. First, it withdrew behind E/2/5. By 0600, under orders of the Bn CO, it withdrew to a valley position just west of the town. E/2/5 at about 0300-0400 defeated an attack of 200 Chinese. In the morning, its right flank now exposed, it had to abandon HILL 1403 and take up a valley position.

On SOUTHWEST RIDGE, strong Chinese pressure, and the risk of outflanking from the south resulted in CO 3/7 moving Cos. A and I back to positions on and around HILL 1294, as A/1/7 was pulled back from here to another position.



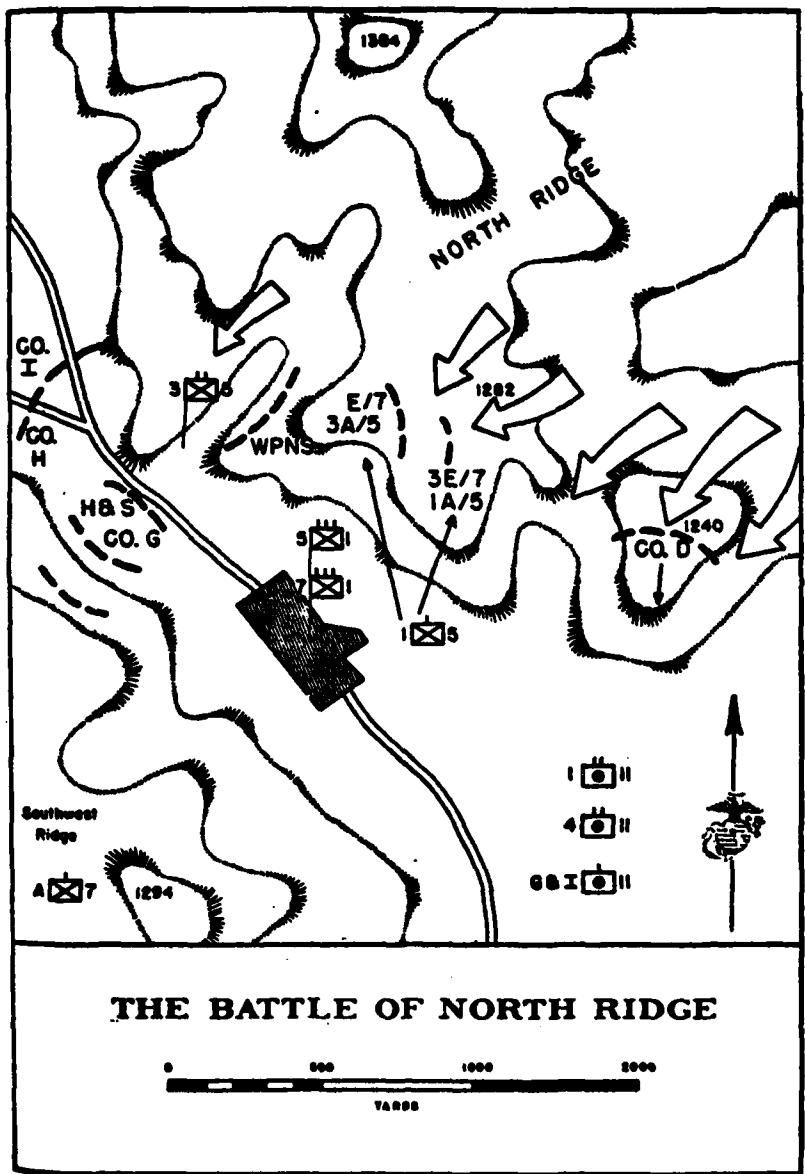
MAP 5

The same night, in an action related to, but not treated in this engagement report, an attack by assault battalions of 3 CCF regiments struck NORTH RIDGE, and in fighting as intensive as that at NORTHWEST RIDGE, suffered heavy casualties as elements of 2/5 and 2/7 held them off (see Map 6).

Meanwhile, in the SOUTH RIDGE area, B/1/7 had been hit hard at dusk, and was withdrawn temporarily to the vicinity of HILL 1419, east of the MSR (Map 3). C/1/7 then occupied this ground and B/1/7 (-), badly depleted, withdrew into Yudam-ni. F/2/7 took up a blocking position at Toktong Pass. The 59th CCF Division moved to envelop the Regimental positions and cut the MSR at both these areas (HILL 1419 and Toktong Pass). The Chinese almost overran a platoon of Co. C. The position was restored, but Co. C soon found itself encircled.

November 29

Co. C drew its defense perimeter on HILL 1419 and awaited relief from Yudam-ni, while the CO watched Communist forces maneuver all around this position. The two Regimental CO's decided that all available troops were still needed to hold the NORTH RIDGE and secure Yudam-ni. No troops could be spared to relieve C/1/7. That night, they formed a relief task force, commanded by the Exec 3/7, consisting of elements of A/1/5, B/1/7, and G/3/7, plus a 75mm recoilless section and two-81mm 7th Marines mortar sections. Relief of C/1/7 and the holding of Toktong Pass were essential if the two Regiments were to break out and reach Hagaru. This force moved south astride the MSR, with three missions: relieve C/1/7, move on to relieve F/2/7 at Toktong Pass, then clear the MSR to Hagaru. It was met with heavy MG fire on both sides of the road 300 yards south of Yudam-ni. Then at 4500 yards (just north of Co. C), Marine planes warned that the enemy was heavily entrenched and in large numbers on high ground on both sides of the MSR. The Task Force was now fighting large numbers of Chinese, who were receiving reinforcements from concealed draws on either side. The 7th Regimental



MAP 6

CO, informed that the Task Force risked being encircled, ordered it to withdraw to Yudam-ni.

This night F/2/7 withstood a strong attack at Toktong Pass. The rest of the front was quiet. Also this night, the Division Commander, having learned of the failure of the Task Force to break out, issued orders for 5th Marines to hold Yudam-ni while the entire 7th Marines was employed to "clear MSR to Hagaru without delay employing entire regiment." (This mission resulted in several changes, with 3/7 becoming the rearguard battalion.)

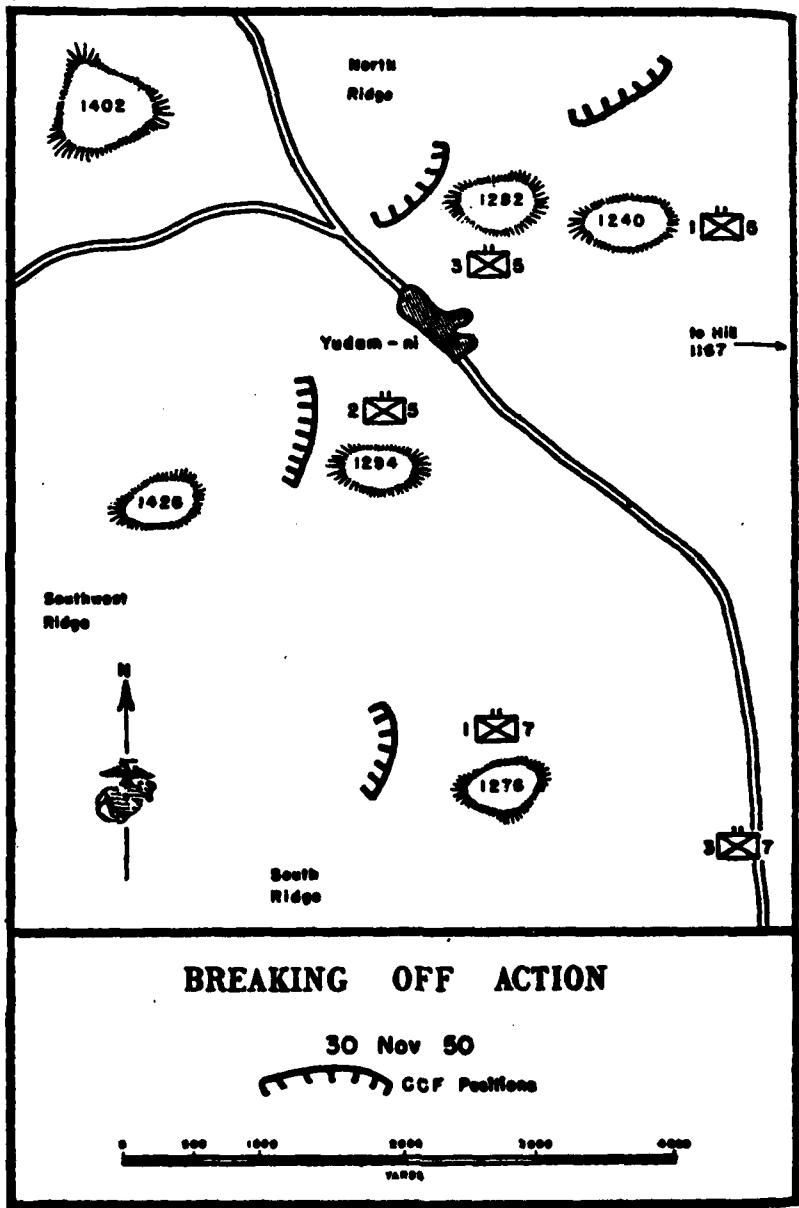
November 30

This mission required extensive readjustments of the 5th Marine positions. The two Regimental CO's issued a joint operations order, approved by the Division CG, to reorganize and free the 7th Marines to drive south. 2/5 withdrew to HILL 1294, freeing G and I/3/7, which now redeployed 4,000 yards south of the town, facing HILL 1419. 1/7 blocked to the west around HILL 1276 (Map 7).

December 1

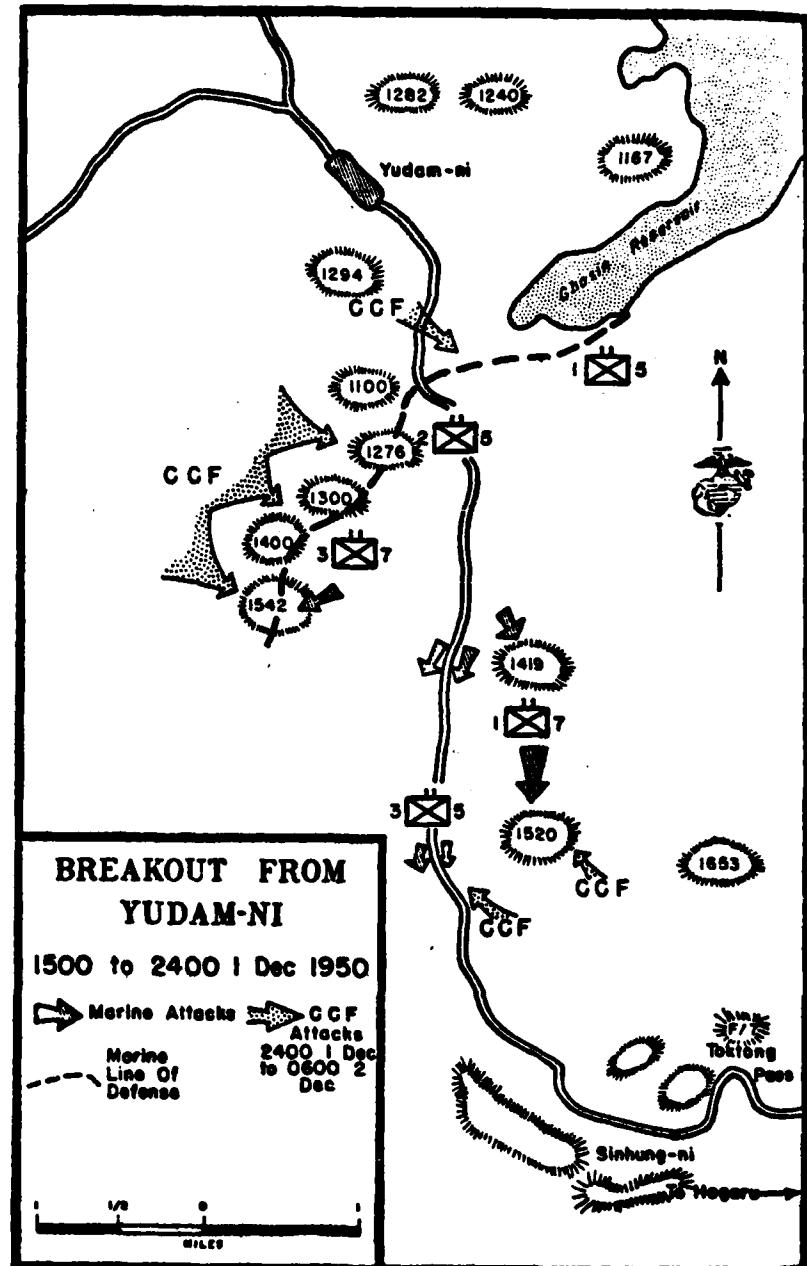
The joint plan required attacking along the MSR. As the wounded could not be carried over the mountains, Toktong Pass must be captured. It was planned initially for 3/7, 2/5, and 1/5 to hold the defensive line in Map 8. Then, 3/5 would pass through 3/7 and attack toward Toktong Pass. At dusk, after 1/7 fought all day to hold HILL 1419 and gain HILL 1520, 3/7 had not yet taken the 3 hills south of HILL 1276. 3/5 was poised to pass through 3/7 and attack toward Toktong Pass.

H/3/7 had attacked that morning to relieve C/1/7 on HILL 1419, but met stiff opposition. At noon, as H/3/7 suffered heavy casualties, A/1/7 aided by B and by H/3/7 finally took this hill before 1900. Meanwhile, at 1700, I/3/7 with strong artillery support, was moving slowly against



MAP 7

A-192



MAP 8

A-193

HILL 1542. At 1700, with Co. G on the left, the two companies assaulted. Each successive attack was broken up before it could move up the hill. By night they had consolidated a position on its eastern slope.

While 2/5 and 1/7 drove south toward the hills around Toktong Pass, 3/7 held fast on the slope of HILLS 1300, 1400, and 1542.

As CCF forces repeatedly attacked 2/5 positions at and north of HILL 1276, a CCF attack hit 3/7 (-) on HILL 1542. By this time Cos. G and I had a provisional unit "J"/3/7 in line, 100 cannoneers and Headquarters troops. Opposing were 3 companies of CCF 3/235. The CCF mission was: "annihilate the defending enemy before daylight." The CCF attacked from the summit downhill. The attack hit Cos. I and "J." The CCF suffered heavy casualties, but overran Co. "J." Co. I withdrew slightly, to come abreast of G/3/7 which had been less heavily engaged. These two companies, reduced to a total of less than 200, plus a few H and S Co. men, formed a defense area running from the MSR 1100 yards, to include the eastern slope of HILL 1542. There were about 30 to 40 Marine casualties in this action. 3/7 (-) began disengaging from these positions on December 2 against moderate opposition. Following the successful but costly breakthrough of 1/7 and 2/5 at Toktong Pass, 3/7 successfully withdrew to Hagaru, taking 79 hours to reach there.

#### AFTER-ACTION SUMMARY

This engagement was characterized by an initial offensive, which soon had to be converted into a deliberate defense of Yudam-ni and the MSR, then to a disengagement and withdrawal in the face of superior forces and a major Chinese offensive.

On November 26, 3/7 advanced in daylight, capturing the initial objectives (HILLS 1426 and 1403) after an all-daylight fight. It lost HILL 1426 in a counterattack, and held positions on its eastern slope, but held HILL 1403. This night, Co. H (along with E/2/5) withstood a major

attack, suffering heavy casualties, including casualties to all but 1 officer. The depleted Company had to abandon HILL 1403 by dawn. Cos. G and I were drawn back to HILL 1294 and the low ground to the south, when the scale of the threat was recognized, while D/2/5 held ground to the east and north of HILL 1426.

On November 28, Co. I was kept under pressure around HILL 1294, as the depleted Co. H was reorganized, and Co. G assembled in Yudam-ni and prepared to take up a new position. On November 29, Co. G as part of a battalion-sized Task Force under its Bn Exec attempted a breakthrough south to relieve Co. C at HILL 1419, but had to be withdrawn after a stiff engagement because the CCF dominated the approaches to its objective in force. On December 1, after a quiet November 30, H/3/7 was unable to take HILL 1419 alone; it was finally captured that day in a 3-company attack including H/3/7. Cos. G and I were unable to capture HILL 1542, so they consolidated on its eastern slope. They withstood a strong night attack, giving little ground. On December 1, 3/7 (-) successfully disengaged, and for the next 3 days moved down the MSR to Hagaru against some harassing fires, but without further significant losses. It was the last rearguard unit.

Total Division casualties for the period were 3150, about one-third non-battle, mainly from frostbite. For the period November 30-December 4 there were 1140 battle and 1194 non-battle casualties. 3/7 casualties from November 27 to December 4 were estimated at 560.

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ENGAGEMENT 35. OPERATION HARVEST MOON - A COORDINATED OPERATION WITH THE  
SOUTH VIETNAMESE BY THE 2ND BATTALION, 7TH MARINES WITH  
SUBSEQUENT SHOCK ENGAGEMENT IN SOUTH VIETNAM, 1965

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INTRODUCTION

This engagement is the first in a series describing actions in which the 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines was engaged during the Vietnamese war, in which the nature of the operation, the strength and disposition of the enemy, the tactics of the battalion, the element of surprise, the environment, the intensity of the battle, or the nature of the outcome was of sufficient importance to warrant its inclusion in the study of the battalion's effectiveness under different conditions or commanders. The operation was a direct result of decisions reached during a visit by Defense Secretary McNamara to Saigon on 28 November 1965. Together with Mr. McNamara were the JCS Chairman, General Wheeler, and Assistant Secretaries McNaughton and Sylvester. They held a 5-hour meeting with Admiral Sharp, General Westmoreland, and MACV's principal staff officers and subordinate commanders, including General Walt, CG III MAF. Decided at the conference was that the accelerating infiltration by North Vietnamese regulars would clearly require counteraction on the part of the South Vietnamese, supported by U.S. forces.

UNIT BACKGROUND

Because of the tenuous military situation in the II Corps Tactical Zone, about mid-June 1965 General Westmoreland had asked General Walt to be prepared to deploy two Marine battalions to the Pleiku-Kontum area if required. But the port of Qui Nhon presented a more immediate problem since the security of the airfield and the growing Army logistics base had to be maintained until Army combat troops could arrive.

On 1 July, the Seventh Fleet's Special Landing Force (SLF), then BLT 3/7, supported by HMM-163, went ashore at Qui Nhon. They were relieved on the 7th of July by BLT 2/7 and reboarded their shipping to reconstitute the SLF. Thus 175 miles south of Da Nang in II CORPS area, a fourth Marine "coastal enclave" was created. The battalions of the 7th Marines, a 1st Marine Division regiment, had departed Camp Pendleton on 24 May, stopping en route in Hawaii and Okinawa for final training and fitting for South Vietnam. The 2nd Battalion had been placed under the operational control of the Army's Task Force Alpha after its arrival at Qui Nhon.

Initially the battalion was bound by the same restrictions under which the Marine forces in I Corps were operating in accordance with the letter of instructions issued to III MAF in May -- operations beyond base areas were essentially limited to "reserve/reaction" forces, a kind of rescue operation to be conducted when and if South Vietnamese forces were in serious trouble. In addition the security of the port of Qui Nhon presented a particular problem. There was an airfield there, and a substantial start had been made in creating an Army logistics base, but there were no Army combat units assigned in the area. Qui Nhon had to be held secure until Army troops could arrive. In August, however, General Westmoreland determined that the restraints were no longer realistic and lifted the restrictions on the Marines. The battalion continued primarily in a defensive role, however, until the arrival of the Korean Capital (Tiger) Division in October.

With the arrival of the Tiger Division at Qui Nhon, 2/7 was released from Army control and taken to rejoin its parent regiment at Chu Lai. This was accomplished as a part of Operation BLUE MARLIN, in which it participated in a combined amphibious operation with South Vietnamese Marines beginning 7 November 1965.

The monsoon season was late with the rains not arriving in force until the latter part of October, but by November the rain was averaging an

inch a day. The largest problems were logistics, with flooding, heavy winds, and muddy roads becoming major obstacles.

#### GENERAL PREPARATION FOR THE OPERATION

As a result of Mr. McNamara's decision, during the final weeks of 1965 the Marines were taking the offensive against the Viet Cong outside the three main tactical areas of responsibility (TAOR's) held by the U.S. Marine forces. Although a number of contacts had been made with the 1st VC Regiment, the enemy was proving elusive. Against the Americans, the VC strategy was to avoid the risk of a stand-up battle after the action in August where they had been rendered practically combat ineffective as a result of Operation STARLITE. But the Marines had not heard the last of the 1st VC Regiment, which had been reconstituted. An attempt to bring them to bay in Operation PIRANHA had largely failed, although they had suffered some casualties in escaping from the battle area on the Batangan Peninsula where it was fought.

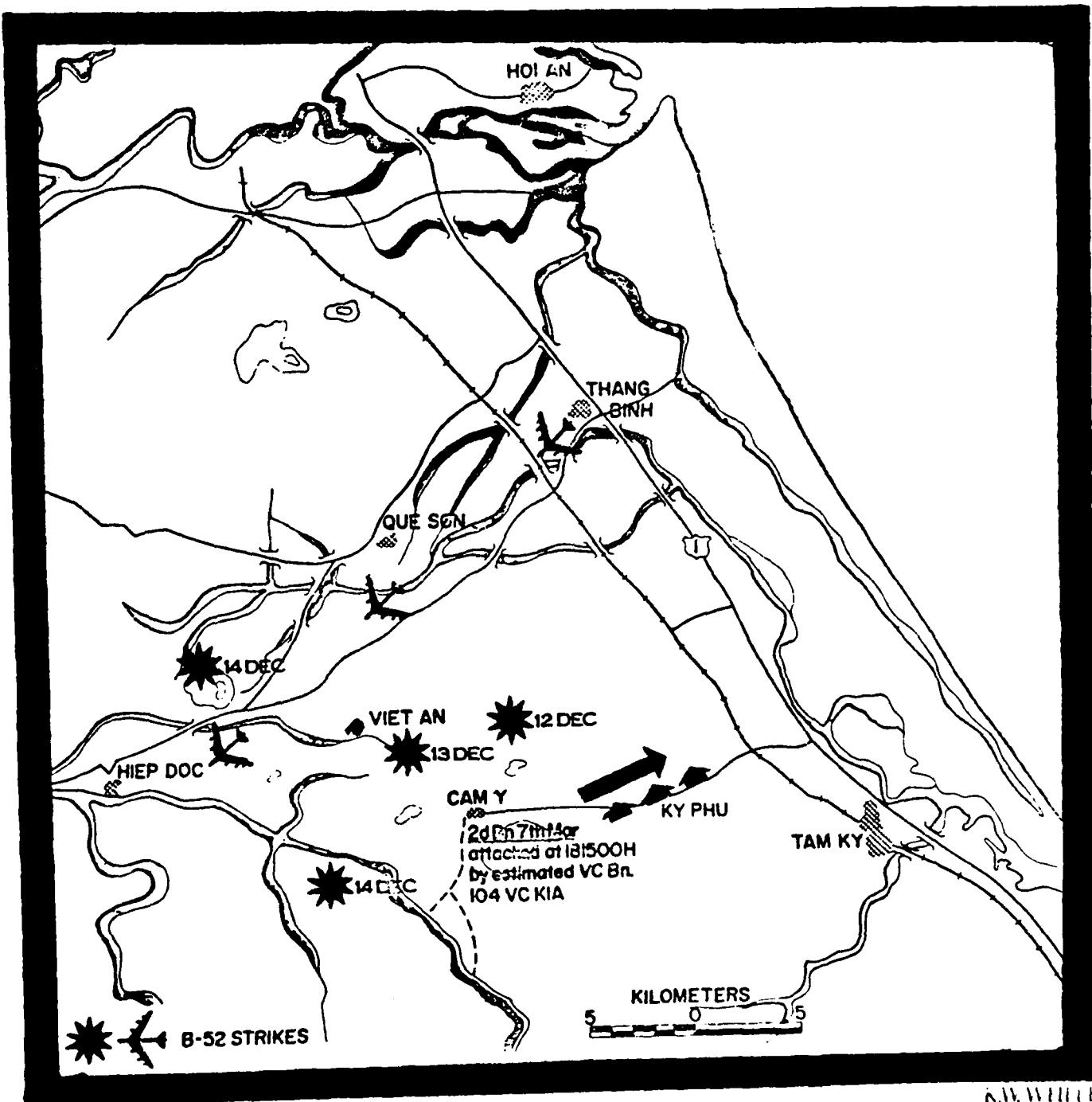
During November the enemy moved into the area between Da Nang and Chu Lai known as the Nui Loc Son Basin,<sup>1</sup> 15 miles inland from the coast. They overran the ARVN garrison at Hiep Duc and, although it was finally retaken by South Vietnamese forces, it was abandoned shortly thereafter because they could not spare sufficient forces to hold it. The VC moved into the area and threatened ARVN garrisons at Viet An and Que Son (see Map 1). In order to relieve this pressure and, hopefully, to entrap the enemy, Operation HARVEST MOON was planned. It was to be a coordinated action with the South Vietnamese, primarily the 5th ARVN Regiment and the 11th ARVN Ranger Battalion.

The scheme of maneuver was relatively simple. An ARVN column, consisting of two battalions, was to move southwestward from Thang Binh into Phuoc Valley. A lateral road running along the valley floor and linking Thang Binh, Que Son, Viet An, and Hiep Duc was to be the axis of advance.

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<sup>1</sup> The Nui Loc Son Basin is also referred to as the Phuoc Valley or Que Son Valley.

**UNCLASSIFIED**



**OPERATION HARVEST MOON - DEC 1965**

K.W. WELLE

Map 1

A-199

**UNCLASSIFIED**

When the ARVN units had contacted the enemy, two U.S. Marine battalions would be helilifted to the rear of the VC force. The SLF battalion, 2/1, would be held in reserve. The Marine forces came under the command of the CG Task Force DELTA, Brigadier General Melvin E. Henderson, who was the Assistant Division Commander, 3rd Marine Division with his CP at Que Son. General Lam commanded the ARVN units from Thang Binh.

#### Terrain and Weather

The Que Son and Viet An Valley complexes had relatively flat terrain and offered excellent observation and fields of fire. However, the Song Chang Valley region had dense jungle foliage which hindered observation and fire. It provided excellent concealment of VC snipers, who were adept at using it to their advantage. However, once 2/7 penetrated into the Song Chang region, its cover and concealment were more than adequate for the Marines also.

The weather was a continuing adverse factor. Monsoon rains produced badly swollen streams and caused loss of valuable time because of the slow, careful crossing required of each Marine. Movement of the unit was also extremely slow and difficult due to muddy terrain resulting from the continual rain. The low ceiling, which prevailed during most of the operation, largely curtailed the use of helicopters and aerial observers.

#### Enemy Forces

On 8 December intelligence information received from the Quang Tin Province ARVN intelligence advisor indicated that enemy forces, which were anticipated to be in the immediate objective area, consisted of the 1st VC Regiment Hq with four battalions, having an estimated strength of approximately 1,900. In addition, the 45th/AKA Bn, strength 350, and an indeterminate number of guerrillas had also been identified in

the area. The VC units were thought to be concentrating their efforts at resting and refurbishing following their attack on Hiep Duc on 18 November. However, it was expected that they could provide firm resistance instead of withdrawing if caught in an inescapable situation.

#### Planning for the Operation

On 5 December 1965 the Battalion Commander received a warning order from the CO, 7th Marines to be prepared to participate in Operation HARVEST MOON commencing about 9 December and to report at 0900 hours the next day for a briefing to be held at Hq 3rd MarDiv. Action was taken immediately to requisition a 5-day stock of both Class I and V, and all unit commanders were notified accordingly.

At 061000H the Battalion Commander and S-3 were briefed by the Task Force Delta Staff at Division Headquarters and received an advance copy of Task Force Operation Order 1-65. Upon return to the 2/7 area the Battalion Commander issued planning guidance to his staff and work began on the battalion order. Because D-day was scheduled within 36 hours, the 2/7 Frag Order was issued at 072400H based on the verbal orders that had been received and the advance copy of the Task Force Operation Order. The final Task Force order was actually received on D-day at 081630H when the battalion was in the Tam Ky area.

#### Concept of the Operation

The 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines was to conduct a motorized-mechanized tactical march on D-day to establish a secure helicopter loading zone for a subsequent helicopter-borne assault to be launched on D+1. One rifle platoon was to provide security for M Battery, 4th Battalion, 11th Marines as it moved from the Chu Lai enclave to Thang Binh, and subsequently provide security for the LSA in that area.

On D+1 the battalion was to conduct a helicopter-borne assault to LZ Spruce in the vicinity of TF Objective 1, after which it would secure

battalion Objectives "A" and "B", and await orders to continue search and clear operations as directed.

Companies G and H were assigned responsibility to secure the North and South portions of the LZ, and, upon order, prepare to attack Objective 1. Company F and H&S elements would follow into the LZ. On order Company G would secure Objective 1 and Companies E and H secure battalion Objectives "A" and "B", Company F following in trace.

Fixed-wing aircraft, artillery firing from the vicinity of Que Son, and armed helicopters were to provide one-half hour of LZ-preparation and 40 H-34 helicopters from MAG-36 and MAG-16 to provide troop transport. Prepositioned artillery at Que Son was to support the continued operations of the battalion.

#### THE INITIAL PHASE OF THE OPERATION

On the morning of 8 December, the ARVN 11th Ranger Battalion and the 1st Battalion, 5th ARVN Regiment moved out. The first hours were uneventful, but at 1130 the VC launched their attack against the Rangers. In one-half hour, the 11th was out of action and moving toward the rear. The 1st Battalion, 5th Regiment did a right turn but could not get across the road separating the two battalions. Marine helicopters brought in another ARVN Battalion from the 6th Regiment and the VC broke contact. Meanwhile the 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines departed the Chu Lai enclave for the Province Headquarters of Tam Ky in two separate tactical columns due to a shortage of M-35 vehicle assets. The first column, consisting of Companies E and F, a platoon of Ontos, and the 2/7 Command Group, closed on Tam Ky at 081115H. The second column, consisting of Companies G and H, the CP rear group, and the same Ontos platoon, closed at 081530H. The battalion bivouaced for the night in a secure athletic field east of the Province Headquarters.

D+1, 9 December 1965

After breaking contact the previous evening the VC returned the next day and hit the 1st Battalion hard again. In this fighting the ARVN commander was killed. At this point the U.S. Marines entered the action. Low clouds had delayed the departure of the helicopter assault past the scheduled L-hour of 090930H and they were not actually airborne until 091040H. The Command Group with Companies G and H landed in LZ Spruce, five and one-half miles to the west of the embattled ARVN unit, and attacked to the east. Companies E and F landed after the assault companies and moved to secure the northern and southern portions of the LZ. Companies E and H assaulted Objective "A" and secured it by 1440 hours. They continued the attack to Objective "B", securing it by 1645.

Meanwhile, after consolidation of the LZ, Company G was directed to seize the eastern portion of Objective 1 with artillery and mortar preparation. It was secured without contact by 1345 hours. Company G displaced to Objective "A" after it was secured by Companies E and H and established a perimeter defense for the night with Company F.

D+2, 10 December 1965

On the next morning, 2/7 resumed the attack, attempting to compress the VC unit between its advance and the positions held by the 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marines. The latter unit had been helilifted just southeast of the ARVN battalions late the previous afternoon and had driven northwestward to link up with the shattered South Vietnamese units. The ARVN battalions reorganized and evacuated their dead and wounded from the previous day's fighting. The enemy and terrain combined to hinder the U.S. advance. Resistance was heavy and the Marines found it extremely difficult to negotiate the hedgerows, jungle-covered hills, and rice paddies. General Henderson decided to commit the SLF, and two companies were landed between 2/7 and 3/3.

The arrival of the SLF battalion, however, caused further complications. Heavy enemy mortar and small arms fire pinned down one company, F/2/1,

in its LZ near the hamlet of Cam La, approximately 5 miles southeast of Que Son. The other company (G/2/1) landed just to the north of the exposed Marine unit but was unable to provide any assistance. The CG, Task Force Delta ordered the Battalion Commander, 2/7 to send one company to assist the 2/1 unit, which was pinned down by fire.

At 101330H Company E dispatched to the south to report OPCON CO, 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines. The S-3, 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines directed CO, Company E to join with Company G, 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines to attack south toward woodline at the northern base of Hill 407 to relieve pressure on their Company F. Company E vigorously pushed the attack, but poor communications hampered its coordination with Company G of 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines and the S-3. Company G fell back on Company E's right flank, exposing it to enfilade fire. Company E continued and enabled Company F, 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines to gain freedom of movement to withdraw. Company E, 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines had seven friendly KIA's and 29 WIA's, two of whom later DOW. Company E claimed five VC KIA and estimated four WIA for this action. Company E pulled back into a perimeter for the night with the remainder of 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines.

Company G, in conjunction with Companies E and H, had moved to sweep the area between battalion Objectives "B" and "C" at 101100H. Company G was in the center. One VC sniper inflicted one friendly WIA and escaped in heavy underbrush. The company apprehended 19 VC and picked up 6 more from Company E. The company commenced movement along the road to battalion Objective "C" (BT 083325) at 101645H but enroute were dispatched to reinforce 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines in the vicinity of BT 067302 as a result of a directive received from CG, TF Delta. The company moved southwest to join 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines closing on their lines at BT 067302 approximately 102015H. They assumed defensive positions for the night upon reporting OPCON CO, 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines.

Company H, in conjunction with Companies E and G, moved to sweep the area between Objective "B" (BT 050315) and Objective "C" (BT 083325) at 101100H. Company H was on the left. Company H was temporarily delayed when Company E was dispatched to 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines zone, but at 101430H was directed to continue to sweep to battalion Objective "C". The company secured Objective "C" at 101640H. The company apprehended three VC during the day in its sweep to Objective "C". Elements of 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marines were moving up on Objective "C" also, and coordination was immediately effected. Company H organized a perimeter defense in conjunction with elements of the 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marines for the night on the objective and established ambushes. At 102115H one VC, assumed to be armed, crossed the front lines and ran when challenged. He ran into an ambush and was KIA. No other contact throughout the night.

Due to the weight and bulk of the ground-mounted 106's and 81's, and the dispatch with which the battalion had to move one company, H&S tactical units and CP Rear Group remained on Objective "B". The Command Group joined the one company on Objective "C" for the night. 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marines also closed on Objective "C" late on 10 December 1965, and coordination was completed by both unit CO's before dark as to defensive responsibilities.

#### THE SECOND PHASE OF THE OPERATION

D+3, 11 December 1965

The plan had been to entrap the VC, but after giving battle on 10 December, the foe proved as elusive as ever. On the 11th, the Viet Cong broke into small groups and attempted to escape leaving remnants behind to harass the Marines.

CG, Task Force Delta directed CO, 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines to consolidate with 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines to secure defensive positions

and be prepared to attack and seize on order mutually supporting positions. One company and the Battalion Command Group closed on 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines positions at 111005H. Companies E and G returned to OPCON of the battalion and remained in the vicinity of battalion CP. Orders were issued and helos requested to move elements of the 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines from battalion Objective "B" to the vicinity BT 067-302 so as to consolidate. Helicopter lift erroneously lifted units from battalion Objective "B" to Objective "C" (BT 083325). After consultation with CG, 3rd MarDiv, CO made helo recon to determine likely LZ's for attack on TF Delta Objective 7.

Plans then commenced to have one company conduct a helicopter-borne assault to LZ vicinity TF Delta Objective 7 commencing 111530H after fixed-wing and artillery preparation. One company was to move as a feint across a rice field located at BT 072290 toward the base of Hill 407 (BT 077276), then return to positions in the vicinity of BT 078302. Weather precluded helicopter-borne assault and Company H moved across the rice field at 111600H. As no fire was received, permission was requested and granted for this company to assault Hill 407 (BT 077276). The hill was taken without opposition at 111830H. Battalion CP Rear Group closed on the new CP at 067302 at 111530H by helo. Company F remained on Objective "C" (BT 083325) as weather closed in before helo lift could be completed. Companies E and G, with elements of H&S, composed a perimeter for the night of 11 December 1965 at BT 067302.

Brigadier General Jonas M. Platt, who assumed command of Task Force Delta on 10 December, decided on a new tack. He suspected that the 1st VC Regiment had retreated into a valley some 6 miles southeast of Que Son, a long-time VC base area. General Thi, the ARVN I Corps Commander, warned General Platt, "When you go into valley, be very, very careful." Brigadier General William Dupuy, the MACV J-3, proposed that B-52's from Guam strike the objective area before the Marines entered the valley. General Platt accepted the offer, and on 11 December ordered the 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marines to occupy a ridge line some 3,000 meters north of the objective area. The 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines was moved to south of the valley to act as a blocking force.

D+4, 12 December 1965

CG, Task Force Delta issued verbal orders to the CO, 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines at 0900H to have battalion stand by to execute a helicopter-borne assault to conduct search and destroy operations to the east and southeast in conjunction with operations of 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines and 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marines. L-hour was tentatively set for 1130H. Two companies were alerted to execute a helicopter borne assault to secure the LZ, with the remaining company and H&S units following into the LZ. The battalion occupied the CP vicinity BT 067302 during the day waiting for weather to break. Two VC and two VCC were captured in the surrounding village during occupation of the area.

At 121330H the mission changed due to cloud cover, and the battalion was ordered to move, less one company, on Hill 407 to the west vicinity of Hein Loc and establish a blocking position. They would possibly relieve VC pressure on an ARVN outpost at Viet An (BT 018268), or attack south from the former position to block a possible VC escape route from the east. All companies were alerted and a helo request to move Company F from Objective "C" (BT 083325) was submitted. Company F returned by helo to battalion CP 12155H, and units moved out on an assigned axis of advance to the west-southwest commencing at 121600H. The battalion closed on Hill 106 at 121830H, where a night defensive perimeter was established by three rifle companies and H&S elements with CP located BT 047294. A Frag Order was issued to conduct patrols and ambushes during the night of 12 December 1965. There was no contact throughout the night.

During the day the first B-52 strike had occurred. It was followed by three other raids during the next 2 days in which the Strato-fortresses hit suspected enemy escape routes in the mountain passes to the south and southeast. General Platt, aloft in a helicopter during the first raid, was very much impressed with the timing and accuracy of the heavy bombers.

D+5, 13 December 1965

CG, TF Delta ordered Company H to withdraw to East-West grid line 28 due to B-52 bombing south of their position early 13 December 1965. He later told Company H to reoccupy its old position after the B-52 raid. The previous day's helicopter-borne assault remained pending during the early morning, but low cloud cover again caused cancellation. The battalion was ordered to sweep to the southwest to Viet An (BT 018268) to relieve VC pressure on an ARVN outpost in this area. Company E was relieved by Company H, 2nd Battalion, 9th Marines at 131210H when Company H, 2nd Battalion, 9th Marines company commander reported to the CO. There was a two-company sweep, with one following in trace to search and clear from present positions to the Viet An area. The CO's Command Group was to move behind a security platoon provided by Company G along a road running generally southwest. Battalion (-) closed on Viet An (BT 018268) at 131940H without major contact, while Company F occupied Hill 185 (BT 022288) at 131610H. The CO discussed at great length the current enemy situation in the Viet An area, with the captain commanding the ARVN outpost. He also determined resupply needs for the ARVN and evacuated the dead and wounded. In addition, the battalion S-2 extracted all known VC dispositions from the ARVN commander.

D+6, 14 December 1965

The next day the battalion was directed to send one platoon to the vicinity of a downed Marine helicopter for security while graves registration personnel recovered bodies. The platoon later had to be secured due to a pending helo lift. An artillery recon party arrived at the battalion CP to reconnoiter firing positions. The CO conducted a helicopter recon of the proposed LZ for execution of a helicopter-borne assault later in the morning. Orders were issued to conduct a two-company helicopter-borne assault to secure the LZ, followed by reserve Company and elements of H&S. Heli lift commenced at 141125H after fixed-wing preparation of the zone and surrounding area. The CO's Command Group landed behind the second assault company. The LZ was secured with minor contact as VC

fled along river bank after first firing reported .50 cal machine gun at helo's and initial wave. No friendly casualties were reported. Five VC were reported KIA, and an estimated 11 WIA from ground action. Close air was very effective, particularly the napalm run. VC were strafed when swimming the river.

The position was consolidated at 141300H. One company was directed to move at 141430H to secure the ground overlooking a suspected VC ferry crossing site. An additional company was sent at 141545H to secure area along the northern bank of the river. The remainder of the battalion established a perimeter defense in LZ for the night of 14 December 1965. The 81mm mortar platoon fired H&I fires during the night. A 4.2 mortar section consisting of two tubes was helo lifted into the battalion CP area for fire support. One additional tube was to arrive on 15 December 1965.

D+7, 15 December 1965

The battalion sent out patrols along the river bank to confirm the location of the VC ferry crossing site. The position was located at 141630H. Company F and Company H, 2nd Battalion, 9th Marines assigned TAOR'S along the north side of the river bank to conduct search and destroy operations. Company H returned OPCON of CO, 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines at 151400H and was alerted to conduct a company-sized recon mission by helicopter on the south side of the river to determine the results of the B-52 bombing strike. The battalion was assigned a reinforced platoon from RF Company, reportedly familiar with the area of operation. It was designated to go with Company H on 16 December 1965. The remaining 4.2 tube arrived, and H&I fires were planned and fired from 81mm and 4.2mm mortars during the night. At 151730H CG TF Delta approved a proposal of CO 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines to conduct a battalion patrol to the east in the Song Khang Valley commencing 16 December 1965. However, the time requirement of 3 and one-half days was imposed due to the need to have the battalion

close on Chu Lai the night of 19 December 1965. This was in addition to a company-sized recon of the B-52 raid area south of the river.

D+8, 16 December 1965

Company H, 2nd Battalion, 9th Marines had VC contact during the night, and at first light it recovered one VC KIA and one WIA. The WIA later died. Heavy rains and low ceiling cancelled a Company H planned helicopter-borne recon mission south of the river. Company H was to provide security for 4.2 section while it provided fire support for the battalion move to the east. The battalion (-) in a tactical column commenced movement east at 160730H. The CO's Command Group moved behind the advance guard and the CP Rear Group with the main body. Movement was slowed by heavy rains and swollen streams. There was harassing sniper fire during the day but no casualties. VC snipers would break contact when return fire was placed on them. The area of Dai Trang was thoroughly searched as it contained major caves. The area appeared to be a VC staging and training area. One building had been used as an aid station with excessive amounts of blood and soiled bandages prevalent. The battalion stopped at the first day's march objective at 161630H and established a night defensive perimeter around the CP. 81mm mortars fired A&I fires during the night as did the 4.2 mortar section from its positions at BT 000232. Wet weather started to extract its toll of immersion foot cases, and resupply helo's evacuated them.

D+9, 17 December 1965

The battalion was directed to send one company from its present position to the northeast to link up with 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines at BT 107233, then pass through the latter positions and again go south to join the remainder of the battalion as it moved directly east. This order was later cancelled, and the battalion was told to rejoin its forces and continue east ASAP. Company G, designated to link up with 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines, continued on its planned course as the fastest means

to rejoin the remainder of the battalion. The battalion (-) moved by tactical column after waiting approximately 1 and one-half hours for Company G. Meanwhile, Company H, 2nd Battalion, 9th Marines moved forward at 171130H to secure the pass. The battalion moved out with G Company catching up and following in trace at 171300H. Sporadic long-range sniper fire continued to dog the column. One friendly WIA was taken with a minor flesh wound at 171330H. A heavy volume of fire forced the VC to break contact. One VC was estimated WIA. At 171540H and again at 171700H VC stick grenades were thrown from dense underbrush at two separate locales, causing a total of four friendly WIA's, none serious. All were evacuated later when resupply helicopters arrived. In addition, more immersion foot cases were evacuated as result of the medical officer's inspection. The battalion closed on its day's march objective at 171810H and established a night perimeter defense around the CP. The 81mm mortar platoon fired H&I fires. No other artillery supporting arms were available due to the location of the battalion.

#### THE THIRD PHASE OF THE OPERATION - THE SHOCK ACTION

While 2/1 and 3/3 were exploiting the B-52 strikes, 2/7 had been conducting the directed search and destroy mission along the northern bank of the Khang River, some 7 miles south of Que Son. The battalion had then turned eastward toward Tam Ky, the provincial capital of Quang Tin Province, sweeping the southern boundary of the objective area. During these 7 days the Marines had to struggle more against the elements than with the enemy. Except for the ever-present snipers, the VC had not made any appearance in force. The constant monsoon rains impeded the troops throughout the period.

D+10, 18 December 1965

The battalion march objective for the day was to be the city of Thon Hai. The tactical column formed up as had been ordered with the battalion Command Group behind Company G, which was to serve as the advance guard. At

0800H, elements of the company killed a VC armed with a stick grenade by small arms fire. Company F moved from its night positions as the main body. Company H, 2nd Battalion, 9th Marines (which had been attached to 2/7 on 13 December) took position in the battalion tactical column as the rear guard. Company H, 2/7 did not take part in the march, but remained as security for the 4.2 mortar platoon. Both were helo lifted to Que Son early in the afternoon.

At about 1000H the column held up to take care of 32 med-evac cases for immersion foot. These men could not keep up with the column, and it was doubtful that they would be able to make it all the way. When helicopters came in to pick up the group near the head of the column, they were hit with small arms fire. The lead company sent a squad to search the area. It did not make contact, but found a network of empty trenches and tunnels. Further search of the area was not practical due to the urgency of getting the column on the move again after the time delay required to accomplish the med-evacs.

No other sniping occurred until the battalion reached the hamlet of Ky Phu, 8 miles west of Tam Ky, when the enemy suddenly struck and triggered the heaviest engagement of the entire HARVEST MOON Operation. The battalion was extended along the route of march with Company G in the lead, followed by Company F, H&S Company, and Company H/2/9 bringing up the rear. The VC waited until the lead company had passed through Ky Phu before opening up on the company with a heavy volume of small arms, automatic weapons, and mortar fire. Company G immediately engaged the VC in a fire fight. The battalion commander directed Company F to move forward to give support to push aside the VC forces, which initially appeared to be a larger-scale version of the long-range sniper fire that the tactical column had been exposed to for some days.

Company F had just passed through the east end of town to arrive at the Company G position with the 81mm mortar platoon when a heavy fire fight

broke out in the area they had just left. The enemy was dropping mortar rounds on top of H&S Company, which was still in the open paddy area west of Ky Phu. The VC had entered the hamlet through the gap left by Companies F and G and attempted to encircle the Marines of H&S Company. The battalion commander then called upon Company F to wheel around and move back to the west side of Ky Phu to relieve the embattled unit. There it engaged a group of VC who attempted to cut through the column with a 50 cal machine gun so as to enfilade the column. The main VC effort was concentrated near the center of the column, as this was where he had most of his firepower and where he tried to support by fire an attempt to sever the battalion tactical column. Company F knocked out that gun and once again organized to attempt to outflank the VC main position. This maneuver was successful and with the help of flamethrower and engineer teams the company knocked out two more machine gun positions, reducing the VC firepower considerably and giving units greater freedom of action, which they desperately needed.

Fortunately, the battalion commander was also able to call upon a Marine 155mm gun battery, which was in range and in position on Highway 1 near Thang Binh, to provide artillery support. Although the ceiling was too low for fixed-wing aircraft to fly close air support, armed Hueys appeared on the scene to aid the embattled Marine infantry. With this assistance, H&S Company was finally able to battle its way through the VC lines and join Company F in Ky Phu. At the outset of this action, communications were poor as both the advance guard and rear guard radio operators and radios became casualties. In addition, artillery, mortar, and air requests had to be relayed over the battalion tactical net, further reducing the element of control by the battalion commander.

Company H/2/9 at the rear of the column caught the worst of the surprise attack. At approximately 1350H the VC force struck the company from behind and from both flanks with a heavy volume of small arms, automatic weapons, recoilless rifle, and mortar fire. In the first bursts of enemy fire, both the company commander and his radio man were fatally wounded.

The company was initially pinned down, and with the loss of the company commander and the radio operator, control was lost for some time.

A young 1st Lieutenant, serving as the forward observer attached to the company for this operation, did what he could for the two men, then strapped the radio on his own back and assumed command of the unit. Calling down artillery and Huey gunships, he rallied the company and built up a heavy volume of fire and with the help of the armed helicopters regained freedom of action. He proceeded to recover the dead and wounded and got an LZ clear for med-evacs prior to moving the company into the perimeter being established in Ky Phu by the rest of the battalion. Once consolidated, he moved H/2/9 into the nighttime defensive perimeter occupying positions facing both north and south and tied in with Companies F and G on the left and right. This young officer was awarded the Medal of Honor for his exploits during this engagement. As an interesting sidelight, he was on 60 days' TAD from Marine Barracks, Pearl Harbor, as part of an "on-the-job" training program. This was his first action.

By nightfall, the fight at Ky Phu was over. The enemy unit, identified as the 80th VC Battalion, broke contact and retreated, leaving 104 bodies on the battlefield. The Marines sustained 11 KIA and 71 wounded.

#### AFTERMATH OF THE ENGAGEMENT

D+11, 19 December 1965

After mopping up enemy and salvaging equipment, early on 19 December the battalion once again formed up in a tactical column to move to Highway L for transportation back to Chu Lai. The enemy had left many dead and weapons on the battlefield, an indication that he had been hit so hard that he was not able to clean up as usual after the battle. The column commenced movement at 1130H and again received some long-range sniper fire. The advance guard immediately engaged them with a heavy volume of fire

and two VC snipers were seen to fall. Armed helicopters on station saw the VC and executed a strike on their position. The column then continued the rest of the way east to Thon Hai without encountering any further resistance. On arrival at Highway 1 the units boarded trucks and moved south to Chu Lai in a motorized mechanized column.

#### RESULTS

The engagement at Ky Phu, in which the 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines repulsed the attack by and defeated the 80th Battalion, 1st VC Regiment, clearly damaged that organization severely as evidenced by the failure to police up their dead and weapons upon conclusion of the battle. Its ranks were so depleted by casualties that it was ineffective in accomplishing these actions which were normally done very thoroughly.

During the operation, 2/7 accounted for 123 VC KIA plus an estimated 50-75 WIA. The battalion suffered 115 casualties - 15 KIA, 5 who died of wounds, and 95 WIA. Thirty-one weapons, including rifles, carbines, machine guns, and mortars, were captured, and numerous caches of medical supplies, ammunition, and clothing were confiscated and/or destroyed.

Significant intelligence was gained on the identification of VC units in the area and confirmation that the Song Chang Valley region was a logistical support and training area for the VC units deployed there. The vast number of well constructed and concealed "quick shelter" caves on the major trail traversed by 2/7 in the Song Chang Valley indicated that the area was heavily traveled by VC units and was most assuredly a major resupply route. Considering the time span of the entire operation and the amount of ground covered through populated areas, relatively few civilians were encountered. Maximum effort was made by the indigenous civilians to hide from the Marine units, indicating not only a fear of American forces but a possible strong sympathy for the VC.

Prepositioned artillery at Que Son on D-Day, plus an additional battery added on D+1, provided the bulk of artillery fire support from D+1 to D+5.

On D+7 and D+8 the 107mm mortar platoon flown into the high ground occupied by the battalion CP on the night of 14 December provided indirect fire support, and on D+10 and D+11 artillery fire support was provided by M Battery, 4th Battalion, 11th Marines, which was particularly effective during the engagement at Ky Phu.

During the course of the operation the battalion was provided 12 close air support strikes, including LZ preparation, preassault preparation, and CAS with both fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters firing a variety of weapons. It was found that, with the exception of the very thick rain forest, napalm was far more effective than other ordnance against prepared VC weapons positions.

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ENGAGEMENT 36. OPERATION UTAH - A SEARCH AND DESTROY OPERATION PARTICIPATED IN BY THE 2ND BATTALION, 7TH MARINES IN COORDINATION WITH SOUTH VIETNAMESE FORCES DURING MARCH 1966

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INTRODUCTION

UTAH was a search and destroy operation launched by Task Force Delta in response to intelligence gained by the 2nd ARVN Division on 3 March during an operation in northern Quang Ngai Province. According to prisoner interrogation and captured documents, the 36th and elements of the 1st VC Regiment had recently moved from Quang Tin and Quang Nam Provinces into a region about 10 miles northwest of Quang Ngai City. This put the intruders within easy striking distance of Task Force Delta located at Chu Lai. The 2nd ARVN Division commander contacted the CO, 7th Marines, informed him of the fresh intelligence, and requested a conference. Together with key members of his staff, the Colonel immediately flew to Quang Ngai.

After a 2-hour discussion, they decided to act on the information which had been obtained, and agreed to a combined operation with one ARVN airborne and one U.S. Marine battalion. Initially, the U.S. portion of the operation was to be a 7th Marines effort, and the regimental commander designated the 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines (2/7) as the assault battalion. This commentary is the second in a series of actions in which 2/7 was engaged during the Vietnamese war where the nature of the operation, the strength and disposition of the enemy, the tactics of the battalion, the element of surprise, the environment, the intensity of the battle, or the nature of the outcome was of sufficient importance to warrant its inclusion in the study of the battalion's effectiveness under different conditions or commanders.

UNIT BACKGROUND

The 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines was a fairly long-term and stable organization. It was a transplacement battalion which had 11 months stateside

operations as a unit prior to deployment to war. One-half of the members of the unit had been together since early 1963 when they joined 2/7 for "Lock-On" Training. These people went to Okinawa and returned in 1964 to serve as leavening for the battalion as it prepared for the planned return to Okinawa in January 1966. Thus, when orders for war were received, the unit was very solid, possessing 50 percent personnel with nearly 30 months of continuous battalion experience and 50 percent with a minimum of 11 months of training with the unit.

The battalion departed its home station in the United States, Camp Pendleton, on 24 May 1965 with the other battalions of the regiment. It deployed for war fully combat loaded, with the assault ammunition on the D-1 platform and full quantities of assault supplies embarked on USS PICKAWAY. They stopped en route in Hawaii for two days of liberty for the troops. This was the first time that secrecy had been lifted on the movement of RLT-7 out of the Camp Pendleton area. On departure from Pearl Harbor, the Task Force was on its way to RVN; however, it was diverted to Okinawa because of political considerations. Every item of equipment and every round of ammunition was unloaded in 72 hours. At that moment, the unit was ordered to RVN. The battalion, which had been augmented and assigned as a Battalion Landing Team, part of the U.S. Seventh Fleet's Special Landing Force, sailed to the south, after embarkation from White Beach, on the USS OKANAGAN.

When BLT 3/7 went ashore at Qui Nhon on 1 July, 2/7 acted for a few days as the Special Landing Force, but on the 7th they relieved 3/7 and took over responsibility for a fourth Marine coastal enclave located 175 miles south of Da Nang in the II Corps Area. They were then placed under the operational control of the Army's Task Force Alpha after arrival at Qui Nhon.

Initially the battalion was bound by the same restrictions under which the Marine forces in I Corps were operating in accordance with the letter of instructions issued to III MAF in May -- operations beyond base areas were essentially limited to "reserve/reaction" forces, a kind of rescue operation to be conducted when and if South Vietnamese forces were in serious trouble.

In addition, the security of the port of Qui Nhon presented a particular problem. There was an airfield there, and a substantial start had been made in creating an Army logistics base, but there were no Army combat units assigned in the area. Qui Nhon had to be held secure until Army troops could arrive. In August, however, General Westmoreland determined that the restraints were no longer realistic and lifted the restrictions on the Marines. The battalion continued primarily in a defensive role, however, until the arrival of the Korean Capital (Tiger) Division in October.

With the arrival of the Korean Tiger Division at Qui Nhon, the battalion was released from Army control and taken to rejoin its parent regiment at Chu Lai. This was accomplished as a part of Operation BLUE MARLIN in which they participated in a joint amphibious operation with Vietnamese Marines, which got underway on 7 November. For the next few months there was an accelerating infiltration into the I Corps area by North Vietnamese regulars, and the battalion participated in a number of actions, the major being its hard fought battle at Ky Phu hamlet in the final phase of Operation HARVEST MOON.

In evaluating this engagement, it is significant to note that Company F had not been part of 2/7 until February 1966. It had been H-2-1 until mid-February. As part of the "Mixmaster" effort to alter the dates of personnel rotation back to CONUS, each battalion from RLT-7 sent a company of Marines to another regiment. In some cases it was policy to scatter them throughout the unit, and in others they were kept as a unit and filled with replacements. Thus, when H-2-1 became F-2-7, they were strangers to the battalion. The CO of 2/7 decided to keep unit integrity, and did not scatter these Marines into other companies. The BN S-3 (who was later to command Co. F) had occasion to meet only the company commander prior to Operation UTAH.

#### GENERAL PREPARATION FOR THE OPERATION

Differing from some of the efforts in earlier U.S. Marine operations, which were marked by lengthy preparations, Operation UTAH was marked

by a rapid commitment of friendly forces with a minimum of planning. The 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines was alerted at 031720H to be prepared to depart for Quang Ngai early on 4 March 1966 to participate in a co-ordinated operation with the 2nd ARVN Division in Quang Ngai Province. At 032115H the Commanding Officer and his staff were directed to report to the CP of the CO, 7th Marine Regiment for a briefing on the operations to be conducted on 4 March. The briefing was actually given at 032200H. Combat and combat service support unit commanders were present. All orders and instructions were verbal. Based on these orders and instructions, 2/7 published its Frag Order 2-66 at 040200H.

At 040730 Company E (-), 2/7 joined H Battery 4/11 at checkpoint number one to escort the latter unit to its designated firing positions in Binh Son. The remaining platoon of Company E was to remain in the Battalion CP until noon, prepared to escort a truck convoy, which was to bring 2/7 units back to Chu Lai should the target area be void of VC forces.

#### Terrain and Weather

Although there were several small hills in the area, the terrain traversed during the course of the operation was comparatively flat and unobstructed by obstacles or heavy foliage. It was, however, laced and criss-crossed with hedgerows. The VC were able to take maximum advantage of these features for killing zone fires. The essential natural materials universally used by combat troops for concealment were in sparse supply in the objective area, but the VC demonstrated their usual remarkable ability to conceal themselves in relatively open terrain. The weather did not cause any major obstacle during the course of the operation.

#### Enemy Forces

The intelligence information initially obtained by the 2nd ARVN Division was provided to 2/7 on the night of 3 March as reliable and valid. It

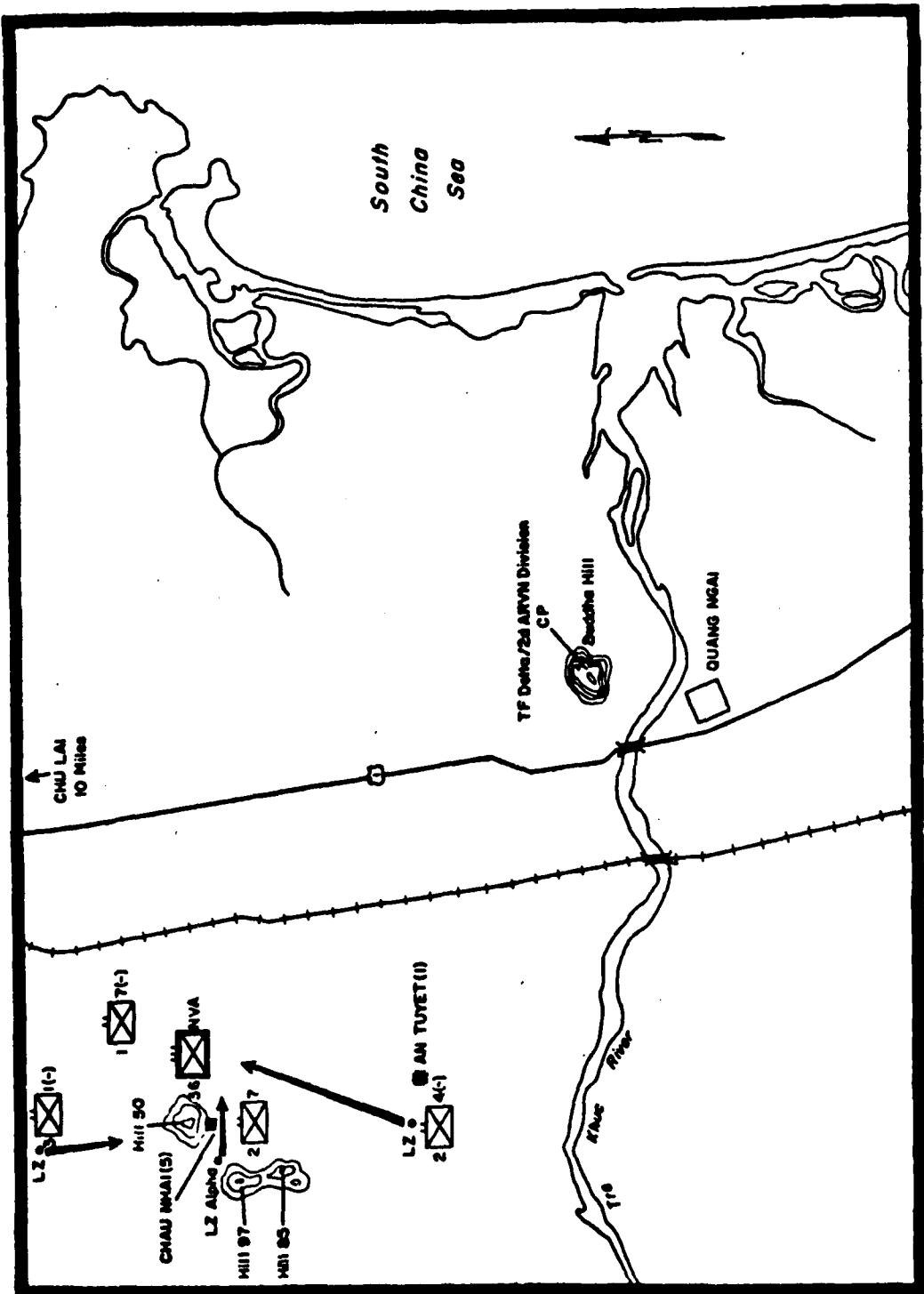
estimated that the forces to be anticipated in the objective area were the 36th PAVN Regiment (strength unknown), the 52nd Battalion, strength approximately 300, two companies, strength approximately 150, and the 210th Doc Lap VC Company, strength 100. Actual tactical disposition in the objective area was unknown. It was initially anticipated that the enemy might possess an anti-aircraft capability, and that it had been concentrating efforts at constructing field fortifications.

#### Concept of the Operation

The objective of the operation was to fix and destroy elements of the 36th Regiment, 308th Division of the North Vietnamese Army, which had recently arrived in Quang Ngai Province. The mission of the 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines (-) (Rein), in conjunction with elements of the 2nd ARVN Division, was to conduct search and destroy operations in the designated zone commencing 4 March 1966, and provide convoy security as required.

The 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines (-) (Rein) was to follow elements of the 2nd ARVN Division into LZ ALFA (BS 545830) at approximately L+1 hour. Company F, as the leading element of 2/7, was to relieve 2nd ARVN Division units for the security of the LZ upon landing. Company G, upon consolidating in the LZ, was to move south by 300 meters and on order secure Hill 85. Company H, upon consolidation in the LZ, was to move southwest by 300 meters and on order secure Hill 97. H&S Company was to follow the Command Group, which was to move behind Companies G and H when ordered to move out, and Company F would bring up the rear and act as battalion reserve. After securing Hills 85 and 97, 2/7 would commence search and destroy operations to the southeast, remaining south of the road, and tying in with ARVN forces who were to move north of the road. M Battery, 4/11 would provide artillery fire support from Binh Son, and air was to be on station (see Map 1).

## **OPERATION UTAH**



MAP 1

## THE ENGAGEMENT

### D-Day, 4 March 1966

Early on the morning of 4 March 1966 Operation UTAH began when Marine helicopters covered by close air support took the ARVN 1st Airborne Battalion to a point southwest of Chau Nhai (5). The landing zone was hot with automatic weapons fire. A Marine F-4 was lost, but the Vietnamese battalion landed and went into the attack in good order.

Meanwhile at 0700H Company E(-) (Rein), 2/7 departed by motor convoy from the CP to join M Battery, 4/11 on Highway 1 and provide security for the latter's move to Binh Son. This element of 2/7 had no further contact with the battalion during Operation UTAH, having later been placed under the operational control of the CO, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines. One rifle platoon of Company E remained in the CP to provide convoy escort to Binh Son.

The remainder of the battalion moved from the CP to LZ CARP at 0815H for an approximate 0930H helo lift. The leading elements of Company F departed the pickup LZ at 1040H, arriving at the landing site (LZ ALPHA) at approximately 1100H. They landed piecemeal amidst heavy antiaircraft fire, which included at least two .50 caliber machine guns. The 1st Platoon was isolated in the LZ under heavy fire for about 15 minutes. Although the LZ had been relatively "secured" by the ARVN Airborne Battalion, four helicopters had been hit. The assault platoon of Company F had one casualty, who was promptly evacuated by a returning helicopter. The rest of the company, the battalion Command Group, and Companies H and G arrived shortly thereafter.

One of the UH-34's took several hits while taking off, slued out of formation, and crash-landed about 1,500 meters southwest of the LZ. The crew escaped injury, and since the aircraft was repairable the battalion commander dispatched a platoon from Company G as a security force

until the downed chopper could be retrieved. Later, a second UH-34 suffered a similar fate in LZ ALPHA and one platoon from Company H remained for security; thus, 2/7 was light by two platoons before the operation was three hours old.

The battalion -- minus Company F which had been left with the ARVN -- began an initial push from LZ ALPHA toward a hill mass to the southeast while the ARVN swept to the east. The terrain was flat and marshy with a maze of hedgerows providing the only major obstacles. Two dominating hills -- 97 and 85 -- in the Marine sector had been assigned to Companies H and G as objectives. Hill 50 -- Doughnut Hill -- was the key terrain in the ARVN sector. The entire area was dotted by a series of hamlets which made up the Chau Nhai village (Son Tinh District); four of these hamlets extended in an irregular arc across the Marines' front and along their left flank. The ARVN were advancing on a hamlet -- Chau Nhai (5) -- which stretched along the southern base of Hill 50 when they touched off the biggest fight of the operation.

The crackle of small arms fire and the staccato of machine guns to the northeast indicated to the Marines that the ARVN had made solid contact. Shortly thereafter, the U.S. advisor to the South Vietnamese unit contacted the CO, 2/7, stated that he was heavily engaged, and requested assistance. Even though the Marines had already flushed out and quickly disposed of 10 VC, it was obvious to the 2/7 commander that the airborne battalion had stumbled onto much bigger game. After receiving permission from higher authority, orders were issued at 041342H for Companies F and G to move to the east with Company F tying in with the ARVN right flank. Company H would bring up the rear with H&S Company elements following in trace of the lead companies. As the Marines plowed through the muddy rice paddies, the only resistance came in the form of a few long-range sniper rounds or an occasional string of dust geysers raised on high ground by distant machine gunners. This was the same type of harassment that had greeted the participants of DOUBLE EAGLE, and the

Marines knew that if they did not quickly press the attack and close with the enemy, they would escape. In this case, they could have taken their time; the VC were not going anywhere.

The ARVN forces now on the southern slopes of the hill were still firmly engaged, but not quite as heavily as initially. The ARVN senior advisor reported by radio that they were going to work completely around the hill, as it contained caves and tunnels that had to be cleaned out. Company F in turn was directed to continue to move on the ARVN right flank until oriented to the north and then hold its line at this point until Company G moved abreast. Reports from the ARVN advisor indicated that the VC had withdrawn to the northeast.

Company F came abreast of G, and the two companies pushed forward on line while the 2/7 CP, Company H, and the H&S Company followed in trace. While the South Vietnamese began clearing a series of caves along the southern and southeastern slopes of Hill 50, Company F skirted their right flank and, moving slightly ahead of Company G, continued the advance. At 1450, a large, well-entrenched enemy unit suddenly raked Company F's left flank with a heavy volume of small arms, automatic weapons, and mortar fire; simultaneously, Company G was stopped by another blistering fusillade from the front.

It was obvious from the start that this was no lightly armed local guerrilla unit. In fact, the Marines had run into two VC battalions armed with 60mm and 82mm mortars, 57mm recoilless rifles, and at least four .50 caliber machine guns. The NVA troops occupied stout bunkers of logs and earth with overhead cover. The fortifications were also linked with landline communication wire for command control purposes. The fighting in the opening minutes was at close range and extremely fierce. Even after a flamethrower squad with Company G assaulted and snuffed out two well-emplaced machine guns, the heavy volume of fire from the enemy positions continued. To make matters worse, Company G was minus the platoon, which was providing security for one of the downed choppers, and this

weakened the company's right flank. The VC noted this flaw and attempted to envelop them from the east. Before the enemy could exploit the situation, the battalion commander rushed Company H (-) to the front where they quickly tied in on the right of Company G, occupying a dominating hill facing to the east and south and sealing off the vulnerable flank.

The heaviest action was on the opposite end of the front. Company F, which had advanced past the ARVN positions, also had an exposed flank. The company commander had been hit by a 12.7 round early in the fight, but continued to carry out his duties until relieved by the assistant battalion operations officer, who left the CP, snaked his way through a hail of enemy bullets, and took over the company. Upon assuming command, he reported that the situation there was serious; the 1st Platoon, which was on his extreme left flank, had been cut off from the rest of the company and was pinned down. All attempts to extricate the stranded men had failed due to the withering enemy fire. In addition, the company had taken heavy casualties, many of whom were key personnel. For example, the entire 81mm FO Team (KIA), the Arty FO Team (2 KIA, 2 WIA), the TACP (all save the FAC WIA), all but one officer down, and many radios destroyed/inoperative, but worst of all, the new CO did not know anyone in the unit by sight or by capabilities.

Company H reported receiving increasingly heavy sniper and automatic weapons fire from the southeast and began taking casualties. They modified their positions somewhat to protect better the battalion's right flank from envelopment by the enemy and seek additional cover.

Solid contact had now been going on for over 1 and one-half hours, and the battalion had suffered approximately 14 KIA's and 35 WIA's. Initial estimates from the engaged units indicated an approximate 100 VC KIA and 50-75 WIA.

All during this time attempts were being made to move wounded personnel far enough back to be flown out by helicopter. Because of intense enemy

fire only three helicopters had been able to recover any wounded, and both of these had received very heavy fire. Both air and artillery supporting arms had been brought in as close as possible, but the enemy fought on tenaciously from what gradually became revealed as well concealed and dug in positions. Company F was making some headway in getting its left flank platoon extracted with the assistance of the platoon from Company H, and better control and coordination of its other two platoons were now possible, but the NVA had effected a penetration between F Co. and G Co. -- not a large number of troops, but enough to keep the two company commanders busy for a time restoring the flank. By this time the right flank platoon of F Co. was commanded by a Corporal.

The battalion commander, 2/7 radioed the U.S. senior advisor with the ARVN airborne unit and requested that the South Vietnamese push forward and regain contact with Company F's left flank. This maneuver would not only have covered the left flank of 2/7 and relieved some of the pressure on the hard-pressed Marines, but would have put the ARVN paratroopers in a good position to attack the enemy's right flank. After some delay, the U.S. advisor replied that it was impossible to comply with the request; the ARVN commander believed that the real battle lay somewhere to the north and was turning his unit 90 degrees to head in that direction. The captain's voice reflected his concern and regret at this decision, and he took some action to alleviate the Marines' plight. As the ARVN troops turned to the north, he brought artillery fire down on his old position, thereby giving 2/7 at least some help on that open flank. Still, the Marines were receiving the full weight of the enemy's firepower now from both flanks as well as the front.

At this point the platoon from Company H, which had been watching over one of the crippled UH-34's, arrived; the chopper had been repaired and flown back to Chu Lai. The badly needed reinforcements were rushed into Company F's sector to assist in extracting the left flank platoon.

Both the center and right flank platoons of Company F were still closely engaged, as was Company G. The engagement had been going on for some 3 and one-half hours.

As the battle raged, a shortage of ammunition among the engaged companies became a major problem. The battalion S-4 organized a group of 81mm mortarmen and, moving through heavy fire, distributed ammunition to the frontline elements. They suffered several WIA in accomplishing this activity. During the return trip, this small band carried wounded comrades back to the LZ. The wounded were rolled in ponchos and dragged in sled-like fashion across the water-filled paddies by the mortarmen, all this under plunging fire from the left flank. In front of the ARVN attack the NVA had several light and heavy machineguns that had F Co. under plunging fire -- just to add to the chaos. In spite of these efforts, Company F was at times so low on ammunition that many Marines were using AK-47 assault rifles which they had taken from dead enemy soldiers, RPD's, and shot two 12.7's dry in the fighting.

Fighting continued to be hot and heavy for almost 5 hours. The VC appeared quite confident of their position and showed no sign of cracking under the Marine onslaught. In fact, the enemy frequently used the Marines' aggressiveness to its own advantage. As the men of 2/7 attacked, their supporting arms had to be lifted because of the proximity of the combatants. When the assaults failed to break through the enemy defenses, the Marines pulled back a short distance to allow air and artillery more time to soften up the objective. During the withdrawal, the VC left their covered positions and counterattacked. This "hugging" maneuver kept the battle at extremely close quarters and reduced the effectiveness of the Marines' heavier fire support. All along the battalion's front the enemy lines were as close as 50 meters; a jet pilot could use napalm or 20mm cannon fire at that range, but bombs and rockets with their large fragmentation patterns were out of the question. The full employment of artillery was similarly restricted by the close-in fighting.

To better exploit supporting arms, resupply ammunition, and recover a considerable number of wounded, when it began to get dark the battalion commander ordered the company commanders to disengage, pull back about 250 meters, and form a defensive perimeter for the night. He later pointed out his rationale:

Darkness coming; too close to use air and artillery; up against superior numbers; two minor penetrations but no reserve; the enemy increasing his fire and his movement around us; wounded and dead on our hands; and fast running out of ammunition. I had nothing to lose but my pride in ordering a withdrawal -- so I ordered one.

Carrying their wounded comrades with them, the Marines disengaged under heavy fire. The VC, however, continued to display a tenacity unlike any encountered by 2/7 during its previous operations. As Company H broke contact they were hit from behind by 60mm mortar fire, and a large force of VC counterattacked from the east, coming over the top of the hill that Company H had occupied. The men of Company H immediately responded with their own mortars and poured a withering volume of small arms and automatic weapons fire into the advancing Communists. The attack came to an abrupt, bloody halt, and the enemy pulled back with heavy losses.

The last of Company F arrived in the perimeter at 1930H after being forced to leave 11 dead Marines behind when ordered back. The reinforced platoon of Company G, previously guarding the downed helicopter, returned at 2015H. All elements formed into a tight perimeter around the battalion CP for the night.

With the infantry units at a safe distance, the full spectrum of the Marines' supporting arms was brought to bear on the former battle line. Strike aircraft from the 1st MAW homed in on the enemy emplacements with bombs, rockets, and napalm. The arrival of total darkness brought no reprieve to the battered VC troops; a Marine AC-47 aircraft remained on station throughout the night illuminating the battlefield with hundreds of 1-1/2 million candlepower flares. For the attack pilots, night close

air support missions under the parachute flares were extremely dangerous, demanding the utmost in skill and just plain guts. The eerie light and the resulting shadows distorted an aerial view of the target, and the pilots knew that if they were not good -- very, very good -- they could easily end up on the side of a hill. Utilizing the 1st MAW Air Support Radar Team at Quang Ngai, the Marines also employed high altitude, radar-controlled bombing strikes along the avenues of egress from the battlefield.

When the jets had cleared the area, the Marine artillery at Binh Son took over. The task force liaison officer plotted concentrations throughout the four grid squares which comprised the battlefield and applied maximum fires. To meet the needs of the hard-pressed Marine and ARVN infantry units, the artillermen of 3/11 and 4/11 fired 16,000 rounds in less than 12 hours. The cannoneers were so active that they required two resupply convoys from Chu Lai.

In spite of the suppressive fires, the enemy remained active during the night, especially when helos arrived. Medevacs had been few and far between during the day with only three helicopters getting into the LZ. Upon touchdown, one of these choppers was bracketed by mortar rounds and lashed by a burst of .50 caliber machine gun fire. Despite the damage, and being wounded himself, the pilot miraculously got it back into the air and returned to base, but three wounded men on the ground awaiting evacuation were killed. The pilot had been a Forward Air Controller with 2/7 in CONUS, and pressed home his lift against recommendation from the ground. (The LZ was actually inside F Co. lines.) The battalion commander decided to postpone any further attempts until after dark. About 2130, six helos from MAG-36 returned under blackout conditions to pick up the casualties. For the next 7 hours, these heroic pilots evacuated some 70 badly wounded Marines even though the LZ was criss-crossed with tracers and blasted by enemy mortars. The choppers also dropped off ammunition and supplies, which were needed to continue operations the next day.

D+1, 5 March 1966

On the morning of the 5th, 2/7 was assigned the mission of a blocking force from its position, to maintain pressure to the east, and to act as Task Force Reserve. During the day all companies pushed out about 1,000 meters from their perimeter, conducted individual attacks to keep pressure on any enemy, and scoured the area for dead and wounded. The battle line was littered with dead, both VC and Marine, which neither side had been able to recover. The bodies of the dead Marines of F Co. had all been booby trapped by the next morning. However, the units of 2/7 accounted for all of their own; the bloody contest had cost the 2nd Battalion 43 killed, 84 medevacs, and many who received minor wounds but continued to fight. In F Co. alone there were 19 walking wounded still fighting on the morning of the 5th.

Intermingled with the U.S. dead were the bodies of 94 VC, and a further search uncovered another 46 which the retreating enemy had dragged into nearby tunnels. The usually meticulous VC troops had also failed to "police their brass," and the piles of expended cartridges gave the Marines a good indication of why the enemy's defense had been so formidable. The VC had been so well armed that in 5 hours of continuous combat they did not have to ease off for lack of ammunition. From the condition of the shiny, new shell casings, it was surmised that the two main force enemy battalions had recently received an arms shipment which was probably stockpiled in the nearby hamlets. There were no further contacts of any consequence between 2/7 and the two enemy units, which had apparently withdrawn during the predawn hours of 5 March. Artillery and 81mm mortar H and I fires were fired throughout the night, but there was no significant enemy contact.

AFTERMATH OF THE ENGAGEMENT

The heavy fighting in Operation UTAH was over for 2/7. During the next 2 days it maintained blocking positions and engaged in search and destroy

operations, but made no significant contact with the enemy. They departed the battle area at 071710H by truck convoy to return to Chu Lai. The trip back was hampered by lack of trucks, but fortunately no enemy were encountered, or the overcrowded vehicles would have put the Marines at a disadvantage.

#### RESULTS

After the original direction of attack for the battalion was changed and it went to the aid of the ARVN forces, it became involved with the largest VC force. The move took pressure off the ARVN right flank, but resulted in 2/7's left flank being heavily engaged. There was no corresponding action by the ARVN commander when 2/7 made a request for assistance, although it could have put the VC at a disadvantage and might possibly have presented the ARVN with an opportunity to deliver a telling blow to the enemy's right flank.

The enemy had exceptionally well-concealed and strong defensive positions, but was not reluctant to maneuver from them to keep the combat close. As a result, 2/7 was not able to take advantage of the full capability of a portion of the supporting arms because of the enemy's close proximity to friendly units. This tactic differed from the previous experience of the battalion, in which the enemy was constantly elusive and relied primarily on long-range sniper fire as its main offensive tactic.

The necessity for providing security for downed helicopters during the course of the battle caused a significant reduction in the strength of the units engaged. At the height of the initial part of the engagement, 25 percent of the riflemen of the battalion were involved in providing covering security for the downed helicopters.

Resupply of the battalion was achieved totally by helicopters and was excellent. The initial combat load of ammunition was adequate; however, the intensity of the battle caused a rapid expenditure of the basic allowance of ammunition and required immediate resupply. Initially,

resupply was delivered promptly even though under enemy fire. However, a subsequent emergency request for ammunition and medical supplies was delayed for 7 hours in delivery. Thereafter resupply was prompt and complete.

The 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines had its major action in Operation UTAH in the initial day of combat. Subsequently it served as a blocking force and engaged in search and destroy operations, while other U.S. Marine and ARVN units were attempting to fix the enemy force and catch it between their positions and those held by 2/7. By the end of 4 violent days the main enemy force withdrew after having suffered heavy losses. Task Force Delta had severely mauled the 36th VC Regiment. The VC lost 365 killed, 67 wounded, and 4 captured. ARVN forces accounted for another 228 VC. Total Marine casualties came to 98 dead and 225 wounded, while the South Vietnamese lost 30 killed and 120 wounded.

Of the total operation statistics, 2/7 accounted for the following:

a. Friendly Casualties      KIA    DOW    WIA (Evac)    WIA Back to Duty

(1) 2/7	43	1	76	39
(2) Attachments	1		3	2

b. Enemy Casualties and Captives

(1) <u>Personnel</u>	<u>Total</u>
VC KIA (body count)	146
VC KIA (estimate)	50-75
VC WIA (estimate)	75-100
VCC	2
VC Ralliers	1
VCS	18

c. Captured Equipment      Total

DPW - LMG	3
AK - Sub MG	5
SKS - Carbine	6
ChiCom 7.62 Carbine	1
RPG - rocket launcher	1
	16

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**ENGAGEMENT 37. OPERATION ALLEN BROOK - 1ST PHASE - A SEARCH AND CLEAR OPERATION PARTICIPATED IN BY THE 2ND BATTALION, 7TH MARINES, VIETNAM, 1968**

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**INTRODUCTION**

During the first few months of 1968, while the 3rd Marine Division was battling at Khe Sanh and Dong Ha and the 1st Air Cavalry and 101st Airborne Divisions had their fighting in the A Shau Valley and west of Hue, things were fairly quiet for the 1st Marine Division in Quang Nam Province. By late April, however, it became apparent that the enemy had fed in the equivalent of an NVA division south of Da Nang. At the year's beginning the 31st NVA Regiment had been identified in the western portion of Quang Nam Province. In April the 141st NVA Regiment was identified and a little later there was reason to suspect that the 36th NVA Regiment was in Go Noi Island, a delta west of Hoi An formed by the meanderings of the many-named Ky Lam River, and bisected by Highway One and the railroad.

At this point, the CG, 1st Marine Division made a definite shift in tactics. The defense of the Da Nang complex against rockets and mortars, and sapper attacks, had resolved itself into a thickly manned, heavily patrolled "rocket belt" extending in a semi-circle around Da Nang. With additional troops becoming available plus thinning out the rocket belt somewhat, it was decided to have the more experienced battalions fan out in deeper-reaching, more mobile operations which would keep the NVA forces farther away from Da Nang.

Operation ALLEN BROOK, the first of the wider-ranging operations was launched on 4 May 1968. Although initial resistance was scattered, on 9 May the 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines ran into a large enemy force and participated in an engagement which has been selected as the third in a series of descriptions of actions in which 2/7 participated during the

Vietnam war in which the nature of the operation, the strength and disposition of the enemy, the tactics of the battalion, the element of surprise, the environment, the intensity of the battle, or the nature of the outcome were of sufficient importance to warrant its inclusion in this study of the battalion's effectiveness under different conditions or commanders.

#### UNIT BACKGROUND

The 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines had arrived in Vietnam in July 1965. Initially it had been located at Qui Nhon in the II Corps Area and had operated under the operational control of the Army's Task Force ALPHA with responsibility for the security of a coastal enclave surrounding that port. With the arrival of the Korean Tiger Division in October 1965 it rejoined its parent regiment then located at Chu Lai. It participated in a number of offensive operations in and around Chu Lai during 1966, notable of which being HARVEST MOON, UTAH, and MACON. During early 1967 it was involved in operation and defense of the base area, airfield, and ancillary facilities at Chu Lai and in aggressive night patrolling and offensive operations in the TAOR, but contacts with the enemy were only light to moderate. Except during Operation UTAH it had experienced no major engagement with sizeable enemy forces. In April 1967 it was moved to Da Nang to assist in the defense of the "rocket belt" surrounding the facilities at Da Nang. There its main actions were saturation patrolling and small unit offensive operations. During the fall of 1967 the battalion participated in several designated search and destroy operations and in combined actions with ARVN Ranger forces in providing protection to South Vietnamese farmers in Operation GOLDEN FLEECE. In February 1968 command of the battalion changed hands, and it was placed on 12-hour notice as the reserve/reaction force for the Da Nang area. It was the battalion selected to launch the first attack in the new wide-ranging mobile operations in I Corps Area.

### GENERAL PREPARATION FOR THE OPERATION

All units to participate in the operation received the 1st Marine Division Frag Order 94-68 (Unnamed Operation Go Noi Island) on 3 May 1968. The order assigned missions to each unit and confirmed the concept of operation promulgated by the 1st Mar Div warning order which had been issued the previous day. The Frag Order established D-Day as 4 May with H-Hour set at 0500H. It was planned to be a search and clear operation of the 7th Marines (-) (Rein) with the initial task organization to be made up of Hq Co (-), 7th Marines and the 2nd Battalion (-) (Rein), 7th Marines. Extensive aerial observations during April and early May of enemy operations on Go Noi Island had confirmed the existence of recently constructed bunkers and trench complexes. Reconnaissance reports of enemy troop movements and heavy automatic weapons fire against observation aircraft evidenced renewed enemy presence in the area.

### Terrain and Weather

Because of the prevailing flatness of the terrain, observation and fields of fire were good to excellent, the only limiting factor being dense elephant grass obscuring observation in places. Since the enemy was generally emplaced in fortified tree lines, observation and fields of fire tended to favor the enemy. Natural cover and concealment in the approaches to enemy defensive positions were poor. Rivers and streams constituted no major obstacle to friendly movement. Critical terrain features in the sense of commanding high ground were nonexistent. Key terrain in the Go Noi Island area was limited to treelines and slight rises in the ground. The single exception was the railroad track embankment at the grid line (BTOO). Avenues of approach to the island itself were limited by the width and depth of the Song Thu Don. In places, the river was fordable by foot troops during the operation. Within the island proper, because of the flat terrain, movement was relatively easy for foot troops, with the exception of a deep, soft, sandy area in the

vicinity (AT 9454) and (9553). Trafficability for tracked and wheeled vehicles ranged from fair, west of the line (BT00), to poor and unsuitable east of that line. The railroad embankment (BT00) was a significant obstacle to the movement of tracked vehicles. Terrain in Go Noi Island generally favored defending forces.

The weather, although hot and humid, was not a significant factor during Operation ALLEN BROOK, and generally favored neither the offense nor the defense.

#### Enemy Forces

Enemy troop units believed to be in the operational area prior to the attack launched by 2/7 included elements of the recently infiltrated and identified T-3 Sapper Battalion; the 7th Battalion, 3rd NVA Regiment; and composite units of the R-20, V-25 and Q-82 (LF) Battalions. Just prior to the engagement the 2nd Battalion, 36th Regiment, 308th PAVN Division infiltrated into the region by forced march from the Ashau Valley. Prior to the initial contact with this enemy unit there was no knowledge of its being in the area available to friendly forces. The enemy troops were well supplied with RPG rockets and small arms and automatic weapons ammunition. They operated from fortified tree lines consisting of bunker complexes with interlocking fields of fire. Entry into the treelines was controlled by interwoven barbed wire/underbrush obstacles. The fortified positions generally commanded an open area 300-500 meters deep, of indefinite front, which had to be traversed by the attacking forces prior to the final assault. The enemy employed snipers forward and to the flanks of these defensive positions.

#### Planning for the Operation

Planning for the operation resulted from the reaction of the CG, 1st Marine Division to the intelligence concerning the arrival into the area

south of Da Nang of the equivalent of an NVA Division. ALLEN BROOK was initiated to screen the avenue of approach to Da Nang and to spoil the enemy's efforts leading up to the beginning of the North Vietnamese "Third Offensive" of 1968. The broad concept was laid out by the Division Commander, but the development of the detailed plan was the responsibility of the CO, 7th Marine Regiment. It was conducted as a 7th Marines operation with the CO, 2nd Battalion under the control of the Regimental Commander while his battalion participated in it.

#### Concept of the Operation

The mission of the assault forces was to conduct search and clear operations from west to east in the Go Noi Island area of operations in order to destroy enemy forces and installations. The 2nd Battalion (-) (Rein), supported by Tank Company (-), was to attack on an axis of advance from AT 935529 east to AT 952545 and/or AT 968525 and to maintain a quick reaction force available as a helilifted reserve.

Direct artillery support was provided by the 3rd Battalion, 11th Marines, reinforced by Battery Q, 11th Marines. Battery K, 4th Battalion, 11th Marines was assigned General Support/Reinforcing of the 3rd Battalion, 11th Marines. Mortar Battery displaced to vicinity of AT 928539 on 3 May and was joined by Battery I on 4 May to form Battery Group I. The positioning of the available artillery provided optimum support to the maneuvering forces, yet retained the capability of responding to other support requirements from within the regimental TAOR.

#### THE ENGAGEMENT

##### D-Day, 4 May 68

At 0500H, 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines with Company E and Company G each reinforced by a platoon of tanks attacked eastward from Liberty Bridge (AT 927527). Company G crossed the LOD and occupied a blocking position north of Objective A (AT 955535). Company E attacked to the east and

seized Objective A following artillery and air preparation. Contact during the day was light and sporadic resulting in 7 enemy KIA and 3 AK-47's destroyed. Sweep forces uncovered assorted AP mines, cultivated fields, numerous bunkers, and a search of houses resulted in 16 detainees. Numerous civilians were encountered in the vicinity of AT 955534, and consisted mainly of old men, women, and children. A total of 229 civilians were displaced from the operational area to DAI LOC (D) Headquarters.

D+1, 5 May 68

At first light Company G commenced the attack on Objective B (AT 970545) with Company E supporting the attack by fire. Initially, Company G attacked to the north and subsequently moved to the northeast to seize the objective. During the attack Company G uncovered and destroyed approximately 70 bunkers at AT 955540, AT 955545, AT 974535, and AT 976545. Sporadic sniper fire was received from an unknown number of enemy from concealed positions along the axis of advance. An aircraft in support of 2nd Battalion conducted air strikes on fortified villages, bunkers, and trenchlines resulting in 14 structures destroyed and 7 damaged. At 1700 Company E linked up with Company G on the objective and both companies consolidated their positions. At 1815 the Command Group received sniper fire from AT 976545 across the Song Thu Don and at 2115 received small arms fire and three mortar rounds from enemy positions to the south and west resulting in 3 USMC WIA. Return fire killed two enemy.

D+2, 6 May 68

At 0530 Company E and Company G continued the attack along dual axes of advance toward Objective C (At 983530). While sweeping toward the objective, Company E found one enemy KIA as a result of small arms fire. Engineers in support of the operation destroyed numerous bunkers at

AT 982536. An air observer (AO) in support of the 2nd Battalion conducted air strikes on fortified villages at AT 989532, AT 986528, and AT 976516 resulting in 6 enemy KIA, 3 structures destroyed and 1 damaged. A reconnaissance team observed 15 enemy moving out of a treeline (AT 992525) at 0830. Air strikes were conducted and resulted in 15 enemy KIA. At 1300 Objective C was secured and the attack continued east to the railroad track (AT 997546 to BT 003526). At 1600 Company E found one B-40 rocket and 200 rounds of 12.7mm linked ammo. At 1630 a Company G squad on an LVT took sniper fire from AT 980538 resulting in 1 USMC WIA. The squad returned fire and the enemy broke contact. An AO received sniper fire at AT 997550, BT 002543 and conducted an air strike on fortified villages at AT 997550, AT 996552, BT 001544, and BT 002543, resulting in 18 structures destroyed and 13 damaged. At 1800 the CP received sniper fire from AT 995546. Scout/Snipers returned fire, killing two enemy. At 1850 a reconnaissance team observed 24 enemy moving northeast (AT 954529). Company E received sniper fire at 2315 from BT 000544 resulting in 1 USMC WIA.

D+3, 7 May 68

At 0630 an armored column of five tanks and five LVT's (two of which were inoperable and had to be towed) with a platoon of Company E moved west toward Liberty Bridge. At 0700 the armored column observed 10 NVA in green uniforms with packs and rifles moving south (AT 987536). The tanks fired and killed five enemy. Company E (-) received sniper fire from BT 000544 and returned fire killing one enemy. An AO conducted air strikes on a fortified village in the vicinity of AT 970552 resulting in 7 structures destroyed and 10 damaged. At 0900 the armored column engaged an enemy force in the vicinity of AT 970550. The column received heavy automatic weapons, small arms, and RPG fire resulting in 3 USMC KIA and 6 USMC WIA. Return fire consisting of 90mm, .30 caliber, .50 caliber, and small arms resulted in 30 NVA KIA. Company G and Company E (-) attacked westward to the area of contact. Company G received sniper fire from AT 991541 and returned fire with .30 caliber killing three NVA.

At 1300 Company G came under fire from AT 972546. A tank and Company E sweep force received .50 caliber, rockets, and small arms fire while moving through a village resulting in 5 USMC KIA, 25 USMC WIA, and 5 NBC. Small arms, .50 caliber, .30 caliber, and 90mm fire was returned while artillery and airstrikes were conducted resulting in 12 NVA KIA. The sweep of the battle area uncovered 10 bunkers, 40 B-40 rocket rounds, 5 AK-47's, 1 HVAR 2.75 inch rocket launcher, packs, gas masks, and assorted 782 gear. At 1520 the 2d Battalion assumed OPCON of Company K, 3d battalion, 7th Marines which was positioned at Liberty Bridge. Company K commenced an attack eastward to the vicinity of Objective A. An AO conducted airstrikes on fortified villages at AT 982553, AT 971542, AT 952534, and AT 960540, resulting in 30 structures destroyed, 18 damaged, 6 bunkers destroyed, and 1 enemy mortar position silenced. Co E (-) and Company G linked up with the armored column and consolidated their positions in the vicinity of AT 968551.

At 1800 Company E and Company G received 82mm mortar fire from an enemy position to the south resulting in 19 USMC WIA. At 1845 the Command Group, Company E, and Company G received an unknown number of 82mm mortar rounds from AT 969542. Air strikes and artillery missions were conducted on the suspected enemy positions and the mortar fire ceased. Company K remained in the vicinity of Objective A and established night positions. At 1920 Company E observed three enemy at AT 965551. Three NVA were killed by 90mm gun fire. Company K's perimeter received 7 incoming grenades resulting in 4 USMC WIA at 2000. Tanks on the perimeter received 7 RPG rounds at 2115, sustaining slight damage. At 2245 tanks on the perimeter observed two enemy wearing green utilities and carrying weapons. Tanks took the enemy under fire with 90mm resulting in two enemy KIA.

D+4, 8 May 68

A reconnaissance team observed 62 VC/NVA moving south (BT 009524) at 0630. Company G and Company E attacked toward Objective A at 0630.

At 0830 Company E observed four enemy in green utilities carrying rifles

in the vicinity of AT 948548. Tanks fired 90mm resulting in 4 enemy KIA. The Command Group received sniper fire at the same time resulting in 1 USMC WIA. At 0840 an AO conducted air strikes on a fortified village at AT 965545 resulting in 3 structures destroyed, 4 damaged, and small secondary explosions. At 0920 one body dressed in black pajamas was seen floating down the river (AT 943543). Link up was effected with Company K on Objective A and Company G moved to Liberty Bridge (AT 927527) supported by tanks and LVT's. The tanks were refueled and the LVT's were displaced from the operational area. Tank resupply was completed and Company A, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines relieved Company G at 1320. Company A supported by tanks proceeded to Objective A. At 1445 the Command Group at AT 949541 came under heavy small arms and automatic weapons fire from an unknown number of enemy to the south (AT 949538) resulting in 1 USMC KIA and 7 USMC WIA. Fire was returned and enemy fire ceased. At 1820 a dozer tank detonated an AT mine, disabling the vehicle and resulting in 2 USMC WIA. During a helicopter resupply of units (AT 948541) the perimeter took small arms fire and five rounds of 82mm mortar fire. Fire was returned and airstrikes were conducted on the enemy positions. Between 1830 and 1920 reconnaissance observed a total of 31 VC/NVA moving southwest (BT 009521).

D+5, 9 May 68

At 0500 Company A, Company K, and Company E commenced the attack on Objective 1 (AT 970555). At 0830 they observed 14 enemy moving north (AT 990518). Company A received sniper fire from AT 974545 resulting in one USMC WIA. Air strikes were conducted resulting in 15 structures destroyed and 14 damaged, and 1 enemy KIA carrying 10 chicom grenades and a K-50 rifle. At 0920 an AO in support of the operation observed an estimated NVA platoon at AT 971545. Company A continued the attack toward Objective 1 and captured 1 enemy with 3 chicom grenades. At 1120 Objective 1 was secured and Company K commenced the attack to Objective 2 (AT 970545), with Company E in trace and Company A supporting the attack by fire.

At 1400 Company E received sniper fire from an unknown number of enemy (AT 971548) resulting in 1 USMC WIA. An AO in support of 2d Battalion between 1450 and 1815 conducted air and artillery missions on enemy movement, fortified villages, and enemy trenchlines, resulting in 1 enemy KIA, 35 structures destroyed and 18 damaged, 3 bunkers destroyed, 90 meters of trenchline destroyed, and 3 secondary explosions. At 1530 Company A received heavy sniper fire from AT 972549. Air strikes and artillery missions were conducted resulting in 4 enemy KIA. At 1645 Company A received small arms and one RPG rocket from AT 997544. Fire was returned with 90mm, .50 caliber, and .30 caliber, and the enemy fire ceased.

At 1820 the sweep forces (AT 999544) came under intense small arms, automatic weapons, and mortar fire resulting in 1 USMC KIA and 11 WIA. Fire was returned and air strikes and artillery missions were conducted resulting in 80 VC KIA. At 1900 reconnaissance observed 250 to 300 enemy moving southwest (BT 005520). Artillery missions and air strikes were conducted resulting in one large secondary explosion.

D+6, 10 May 68

Resupply of all units was effected by 1100. Reconnaissance patrols were conducted in the vicinity of the railroad tracks to find a suitable crossing site. The enemy had polluted all wells in the area with dead animals. An AO conducted air and artillery strikes between 1345 and 1815 on fortified villages (BT 012546, BT 005534, AT 997534, BT 000555, AT 970530) resulting in 55 structures destroyed, 52 structures damaged, 3 bunkers destroyed, and one small secondary explosion. The CP (AT 999544) received incoming mortar fire at 1600 resulting in one USMC WIA. At 1840 reconnaissance insert Fast Day observed a total of 56 enemy at BT 014533, BT 011524 moving southeast. Artillery missions were conducted but terrain features obscured results. At 2045 the CP located at BT 002548 received 7 B-40 rocket rounds and small arms fire from BT 005549. Artillery and mortar fire was returned on the enemy positions. At 2245 the CP received 30 to 40 rounds of 60mm mortar fire.

Movement was observed to the east and west, and artillery and air strikes were conducted.

D+7, 11 May 68

Company K, assisted by an AO, conducted reconnaissance patrols to locate a suitable route for tanks to Objective A (BT 040540). The AO also conducted air strikes at BT 008538, resulting in 4 structures destroyed and 3 damaged, and 3 enemy KIA. At 1745 Company K made contact with 10 to 15 enemy (BT 003535) resulting in 1 USMC WIA. The enemy was engaged with small arms fire and broke contact. Company E observed 4 enemy (BT 002548) with packs and rifles at 1845. Air strikes were conducted on the enemy resulting in 4 enemy KIA. During resupply at BT 002548, the battalion perimeter received sniper fire from AT 996552. HUIE gunships fired on enemy positions resulting in two enemy KIA. At 1730 and 1900 reconnaissance insert Flaky Snow observed a total of 48 enemy at BT 010527, AT 955527 moving west and southwest. At 2010 the perimeter received 1 B-40 rocket round from AT 997554. Artillery missions were conducted on the suspected enemy position and enemy fire ceased.

D+8, 12 May 68

At 0700 the attack commenced westward to Objective 1 (At 990534) along dual axes of advance with Company E on the right and Company A on the left. At 0730 a tank detonated an AT mine resulting in a broken track (BT 002532). Company E uncovered 2 tunnels, 3 bunkers, 4 E-tools, 7 mortar rounds, 2 chicom grenades, 1 pack, 12 first aid packs, a flashlight, and miscellaneous personal gear in the vicinity of AT 999543. At 1030 the attacking forces received sniper fire which was quickly suppressed. At 1145 Company E came under heavy automatic weapons, B-40 rocket, and mortar fire from the south resulting in 40 USMC WIA. Company A maneuvered to support the attack by fire and also came under mortar fire. One tank was damaged by a rocket round at AT 997533.

Tanks returned fire with 90mm, and artillery and air strikes were conducted on the enemy positions. At 1330 Company K at AT 999543 observed 3 enemy moving south and took the enemy under fire with M-79 and small arms resulting in one enemy KIA. Between 1355 and 1800 an AO conducted numerous air strikes resulting in 3 VC KIA and 1 NVA KIA at AT 983535, AT 980525, AT 985534, and AT 963561. At 1715 Company K observed five enemy at AT 995533 and took the enemy under fire with 90mm and small arms resulting in 5 enemy KIA. At 1930 the Battalion perimeter at AT 992541 received 10 to 15 rounds of 82mm mortar fire from BT 000536 resulting in 1 USMC KIA and 1 USMC WIA. Artillery missions were conducted on enemy positions. At 2055 the perimeter received 15 to 20 rounds of 82mm mortar fire from AT 985526.

D+9, 13 May 68

At 0145 Company K perimeter observed 1 enemy with a weapon southeast of its position. The enemy was taken under fire with M-79 and small arms resulting in 1 enemy KIA. At 0640 reconnaissance insert Flaky Snow observed 25 enemy moving west (AT 955521). At 0800 Company K and Company A, with a tank section, commenced the attack along dual axes of advance to Objective 1 after conducting an artillery prep of the objective area. The Second Battalion assumed operational control of Company I, 3d Battalion, 127th Marines at 0700. Company I conducted a heliborne assault into an LZ (AT 976501) following a fixed-wing prep. The assault lift commenced at 0800 and was completed at 1105. A platoon from Company A in the vicinity of AT 985535 came under heavy small arms fire from the south and southwest. Fixed-wing strikes were conducted on the enemy positions. At 1230 Company A sweep forces detonated 1 AP mine resulting in three USMC WIA. Engineer sweep teams detected three 40 lb box type AT mines at AT 985538, and AT 989538. At 1315 Company A found one 6 pod rocket launcher with one rocket intact and 15 bunkers at AT 985535. Company I detonated 2 AP mines at AT 987507 and AT 987501, resulting in 2 USMC KIA and 4 USMC WIA while moving from their LZ.

D+10, 14 May 68

Company I (AT 977502) came under an 82mm mortar attack from AT 971513 at 0200. Air strikes and artillery missions were conducted on enemy positions and the mortar fire ceased. At 0600 Company I commenced movement to blocking position in the vicinity of AT 967538 and at 0730 Company A and Company K commenced the attack on Objective 2 (AT 970544). At 1130 Company A discovered 1 enemy KIA. Objective 2 was secured at 1200 and Company I remained in a blocking position. Company E conducted an offensive sweep north of Objective 2 to AT 968554. Company K continued the attack and seized Objective 3 (AT 957547) with Company I and Company E following in trace. Company E uncovered three fresh graves containing 3 enemy KIA. Company I detonated two explosive devices at AT 975534, and AT 968539 resulting in 1 USMC KIA and 4 USMC WIA. An AO observed 6 enemy in a treeline at AT 965554 and conducted air strikes on the enemy positions resulting in six enemy KIA. At 2045 the battalion perimeter at AT 956546 received 15 rounds of 82mm mortar fire and conducted artillery counter mortar fire on the suspected enemy positions.

D+11, 15 May 68

At 0515 the Battalion perimeter received 20 to 25 rounds of 60mm mortar fire resulting in 9 USMC WIA. Counter mortar fire was returned on the suspected enemy positions. At 0630 the attack commenced toward Objective 4 (AT 952534) with Company I and Company E abreast. Objective 4 was secured at 0900, and Company A continued the attack toward Objective A (AT 942530). At 0900 Company I discovered one enemy KIA. At 0945 an AC conducted air strikes on suspected mortar positions and a fortified village at AT 902566, resulting in 16 structures destroyed, 11 damaged, and secondary explosions. An engineer sweep team attached to Company A discovered an AT mine (AT 948543), and at 1030 a tank detonated an AT mine (AT 944540) resulting in 2 USMC WIA. At 1215 an AO

conducted air strikes in the vicinity of AT 958543 resulting in 3 structures destroyed. All units continued movement toward Liberty Bridge and closed at 1400. Company 3 and the 2d Battalion Command Group were helilifted from the operational area, and the 3d Battalion, 7th Marines assumed operational control of Company G, Company A, and Company I at 1800. A tactical deception plan was implemented by withdrawing the forces across the river and out of the operational area. Under cover of darkness, the forces effected a night river crossing and reentered the operational area.

#### RESULTS OF THE OPERATION

Primarily as a result of the heavy fighting which resulted when the 2nd Battalion ran into a large enemy force in the vicinity of the ruined railroad bridge over the Ky Lam River near Xuan Dai, the enemy suffered significant losses as follows:

VC KIA	145
NVA KIA	260
VC POW	1
DETAINEES	20
Individual Weapons Captured	19
Crew Served Weapons Captured	10

The intensity of the engagement is reflected in the friendly losses which totaled:

KIA	85
WIA (EVAC)	325
WIA (MINOR)	36
NBC (EVAC)	7

The 7th Marines engagement with enemy forces in Go Noi Island again emphasized the availability of this region to the enemy as a staging, transient, and base area. Contacts of the 2d Battalion, 7th Marines appeared

to have been with enemy units based in that area. However, captured documents and a prisoner taken stated that a battalion had moved to Go Noi during the period of the operation with the mission of attacking FWMAF positions in Quang Mam (P) on or about 18 May. Operation ALLEN BROOK, particularly the night reentry into the operational area on 15-16 May, appeared to have effectively preempted the planned enemy operation.

It was concluded that the area was a major staging area for large elements of VC or NVA units. As a result it was considered to be a lucrative area for close and continuous surveillance and for subsequent operations.

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**ENGAGEMENT 38. OPERATION MAMELUKE THRUST, A NIGHT FOOT MARCH AND SUBSEQUENT ENGAGEMENT OF THE 2ND BATTALION, 7TH MARINES IN VIETNAM, 1968**

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**INTRODUCTION**

This engagement is the fourth in a series describing actions in which the 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines was engaged during the Vietnamese war, in which the nature of the operation, the strength and disposition of the enemy, the tactics of the battalion, the element of surprise, the environment, the intensity of the battle, or the nature of the outcome was sufficiently important to warrant its inclusion in the study of the battalion's effectiveness under different conditions or commanders.

The operation was actually the third phase of a tactical series designated SWIFT PLAY/ALLEN BROOK/MAMELUKE THRUST carried out by 2/7 in July/August 1968 in order to find, fix, and destroy enemy forces reported to be in Base Area 116. SWIFT PLAY was carried out 23-24 July 1968 as an amphibious operation under the operational control of the Commander Task Group 79.5 in the vicinity of Nui Da The and the adjacent mountains. Participation of 2/7 in Operation ALLEN BROOK was resumed the next day when BLT 2/7 passed to the operational control of the Commanding Officer, 27th Marines. After further operations in the Nui Da The area, BLT 2/7 swept in a northerly direction through the Nui Do and Nui Ue Dap mountains and on to Go Noi Island where the remainder of the battalion's efforts took place.

Contrary to the intelligence reports which had been received, 2/7 had little contact with enemy units in the amphibious operations area and found no significant signs of an NVA Regiment in Base Area 116. Because of the enemy's evasive action and the resultant light contacts, no determination could be made as to the identification and composition of the enemy forces, nor were there any indications that it would launch other than harassment type activities against friendly positions in the amphibious operations area.

However, additional intelligence collected from agent reports and verified by aerial photography indicated that at least two enemy battalions were located in the vicinity of Chau Phong (2) (AT 9349). One was identified as the R-20 Battalion. Other indicators affirmed that a higher control headquarters was also located with the two battalions. It was believed that the enemy units had just moved into the area and were using Chau Phong (2) as an assembly point/base area for future attacks to the north and east toward Da Nang and Hoi An. According to captured documents, the enemy intended to attack Hoi An and forward Marine installations in the southern sector of the Da Nang Tactical Area of Responsibility (TAOR).

#### UNIT BACKGROUND

The 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines had been trained at Camp Pendleton as part of the 1st Marine Division which was introduced into Vietnam as a result of Mr. McNamara's visit in November 1965 and subsequent conference at CINCPAC in January 1966. The 7th Marines was already there, having arrived in July 1965 and relieved BLT 3/7 at Qui Nhon. The battalion had left Camp Pendleton in May in accordance with the peacetime rotation of replacements for the Western Pacific. This was a "transplacement" system -- essentially a rotation, on a 13-month cycle, of individual infantry battalions and aircraft squadrons between the West Coast and the Pacific. The transplacement system ceased in September 1965, shortly after the arrival of 2/7 in Vietnam.

On arrival at Qui Nhon, 2/7 was placed under the operational control of the Army's Task Force Alpha and carried out base security duties there until the arrival of the Korean Tiger Division in November 1965 when it was returned to its parent regiment located at Chu Lai. It operated in the area around Chu Lai and participated in a number of operations in and around that area during 1966, notable being HARVEST MOON, UTAH, and MACON. During 1967 the battalion was involved in operation and defense of the base area, air field, and ancillary facilities at Chu Lai and in

aggressive night patrolling and offensive operations in the TAOR, but enemy contacts were only light to moderate. In April it was moved to Da Nang and assisted in the defense of the "rocket belt" surrounding the facilities at Da Nang. Main actions were saturation patrolling and patrol and company size offensive operations. Command of the battalion was changed in August. During fall, 2/7 was engaged in several designated search and destroy operations and operated with ARVN Ranger forces in providing protection to the Vietnamese farmers in Operation GOLDEN FLEECE.

In February 1968 command of the battalion changed hands and the battalion was placed on 12-hour notice as a reserve/reaction force in the Da Nang area. In March, April, and May, 2/7 participated in several search and destroy operations, notably WORTH, BALLARD VALLEY, and the first ALLEN BROOK, as a part of a larger force in those engagements. On 16 June it was reassigned from its mission at Da Nang and embarked on the ships of Amphibious Ready Group 76.5 for transport to Subic Bay in the Philippines for training to become a Battalion Landing Team (BLT) of the Special Landing Force.

At the Special Landing Force Camp at Subic Bay, 2/7 went through intensive training and equipment rehabilitation culminating in a 10-hour rehearsal and landing exercise on 28 June after which it embarked on amphibious shipping and arrived back in the port of Da Nang on 8 July.

From 9 to 22 July 1968 the battalion functioned as a BLT assault force in Operations EAGER YANKEE and HOUSTON IV, and then was engaged in SWIFT PLAY and ALLEN BROOK until 17 August when it was placed under OPCON of the 5th Marines for Operation MAMELUKE THRUST.

#### GENERAL PREPARATION FOR THE OPERATION

The 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines (Reinf) served as the BLT amphibious force for the initial assault in Operation SWIFT PLAY with the mission

to find, fix, and destroy enemy forces, and capture or destroy enemy fortifications in the area of Nui Da The and the adjacent mountains. After the amphibious assault was executed, 2/7 passed from OPCON of the Commander Task Group 79.5 to OPCON by the CO, 27th Marines, then responsible for the conduct of the ongoing operation ALLEN BROOK, in order to continue the attack in a northerly direction through the Nui Do and Nui Ue Dap mountains. Thus, the battalion returned to the operation it had launched initially on 4 May.

On 31 July 1968 the battalion moved to Go Noi Island, where the rest of 2/7's participation in that operation took place. Command of the battalion had been changed the previous day. Contrary to the intelligence reports which had been received concerning enemy forces in the areas of SWIFT PLAY/ALLEN BROOK, BLT 2/7 had little contact with enemy units in the amphibious operations area and found no significant signs of an NVA Regiment in Base Area 116. The enemy units encountered were squad size or smaller but they made extensive use of booby traps and mines in an attempt to both delay and inflict casualties on the BLT. However, additional intelligence indicated that there were enemy forces in the Chau Phong (2) village complex and 2/7, which had been placed under OPCON of the CO, 5th Marines on 3 August, was given the mission of establishing a blocking position to assist the 2nd and 3rd Battalions, 5th Marines in capturing or destroying enemy forces, weapons, positions, and materiel in that area.

The scheme of maneuver relied on the battalion making a covert night march on foot to the blocking position objective area and then be prepared to attack or shift position on order. The 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines was to execute a similar action to the northwest of 2/7. At H-Hour, 0700 on the 17th, the 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines was to attack from the south sweeping north toward the objective, Chau Phong (2). The night movement was to be accomplished covertly on short notice.

### Terrain and Weather

The terrain for Operation MAMELUKE THRUST was generally flat, vegetated land, interlaced with dikes, rice paddies, rivers, and streams, characteristic of Go Noi Island and the surrounding countryside. Despite the extensive waterways, most of the area was suitable for wheeled and tracked vehicle use. During the period of the operation the weather was intensely hot and humid, which occasionally slowed the speed of movement of the troops.

### Enemy Forces

Prior to the initiation of Operation MAMELUKE THRUST on 17 August 1968 the most recent intelligence obtained from agent reports and verified by aerial photography indicated that at least two enemy battalions were located in the vicinity of Chau Phong (2). One was identified as a sapper battalion of unknown designation, the other the R-20 NVA Battalion. Additional information indicated that a higher control headquarters was located with the two battalions. The enemy force had been detected as it moved into the area apparently to use it as an assembly point or a base area for future attacks against U.S. forces and installations in the Da "ang and Hci An areas.

### Planning

The planning for the operation was accomplished on very short notice in order to exploit the intelligence received on the enemy forces in the Chau Phong (2) complex, after the disappointing results of the previous efforts in SWIFT PLAY and ALLEN BROOK to locate and engage any sizeable enemy forces. It was developed as a multibattalion operation under the control of the CO, 5th Marines, with 2/7 placed under his OPCON to assist as a major part of the blocking force.

#### CONDUCT OF THE OPERATION

At 162300H August 1968 BLT 2/7 (-), consisting of Companies F, G, H and the Alpha Command Group, moved out from the combat base which they had established at Xuan Dai and conducted a covert night foot march to the initial objective along the stream from AT967490 to AT955510, 13 miles west of Hoi An. This movement was successfully completed without any notice by the enemy, and 2/7 established blocking positions with the battalion front facing southeast by 170600H, 60 minutes before H-Hour. They were prepared to attack or shift position on order. To the northwest, the 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines had established a similar blocking position from AT 918497 to AT938510. Preparatory fires were conducted on the objective area, Chau Phong (2), on the following schedule: from H-90 minutes to H-45 minutes artillery prep, H-45 minutes to H-15 minutes air prep, H-15 minutes to H-Hour air prep with CS gas.

At H-Hour, 0700 on the 17th, the 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines launched the attack to the east to a position south of Objective One, the Chau Phong (2) village complex. There it wheeled and attacked to the north toward 2/7's positions, pushing the enemy forces toward 2/7 as it moved forward to seize Objective One. The VC and NVA forces attempted to break out in platoon and company sized units.

While holding their blocking positions, approximately 200 enemy regular forces, wearing helmets and body armor, dressed in green utilities and carrying B-40 rockets and AK-47's, were forced into the area in which Companies F and G were holding. A heavy fire fight resulted. After the engagement had been underway and the positions of the enemy force were fairly well determined, an artillery fire mission was called in and later an air strike. The action was finally broken off at 1700H, but the action had resulted in 53 NVA KIA. Eleven wounded Marines required air evacuation. The battalion established a defensive perimeter and held its blocking positions for the night, effectively sealing off and blocking the Chau Phong village complex for the night.

At first light on the 18th, 2/5 held its blocking position along the stream and conducted patrols north and south to search for enemy forces, and 3/5, assisted by a detail of RVN National Police, interpreters, a PSYOPS Team, and intelligence agents from An Hoa District Hqs, conducted a detailed search of the village complex. Meanwhile, BLT 2/7 launched an attack north from the railroad to seize regimental objectives Two La Thap (1) (center of mass AT948517) and Three - Le Ham (3) (center of mass AT953515).

This resulted in catching approximately two enemy battalions in the objective area. Once the enemy realized that it was encircled, it attempted to make a hasty egress from the area. With the sweeping force moving north through Chau Phong (2), the major portion of the enemy force fled to the east and northeast, attempting to break 2/7's blocking position.

During the afternoon of the 18th Company E received heavy small arms and automatic weapons fire from an enemy force near AT 952506. Company E responded to the fire and called for an artillery mission and air strikes. Support was provided by 2/7's organic mortar platoon and two attached artillery batteries plus F-4B and A-4E aircraft. The enemy forces withdrawing from Objective One were blocked and contained in an area bounded by the stream from AT942500 running north to AT944517, east to AT956517 and south to AT959500. The action continued throughout the day with the enemy ricochetting back and forth between the 5th Marines and BLT 2/7. There were eight medium to heavy contacts, but the Marine forces encountered only enemy small arms and automatic weapons fire.

As the enemy attempted to escape from the cordon, it was forced to leave behind many of its heavier crew-served weapons and caches of ammunition, equipment, food, and documents. Discovery of unburied bodies and weapons by the sweep force further verified that the enemy had been caught by surprise. This was also confirmed by interrogation of the detainees on the second day.

After the enemy broke contact, 2/7 established a perimeter defense and maintained its positions for the night of 18-19 August. On the 19th and 20th BLT 2/7 continued to hold blocking positions and conduct aggressive patrolling to the south and east. The battalion was ordered not to extend its operations in excess of two kilometers from the positions then held. Contacts with the enemy diminished and further discovery of unburied enemy bodies and weapons confirmed the hasty attempts at escape from the area. There was no further major contact with enemy forces so 2/7 was withdrawn and returned to Go Noi Island to resume participation in Operation ALLEN BROOK. At 230830H the battalion received word to commence the return move to Da Nang to supplement the defensive perimeter of the Da Nang Air Base.

#### RESULTS OF THE OPERATION

Participation in MAMELUKE THRUST provided BLT 2/7 its first opportunity, during the month of August, to come face to face in combat with a large enemy unit. Contact with the large enemy force on the morning of 17 August confirmed that the intelligence information upon which the operation had been hastily initiated was correct in detail. The three battalion attack in the objective area proved highly successful both in terms of enemy killed and in food and arms caches discovered and destroyed.

The enemy encountered were fresh troops, well equipped with helmets, body armor, rockets, and automatic weapons. Its determined fight to break through the blocking force gave evidence of the high state of its morale, training, and discipline.

The quality and quantity of fire support available were excellent. Artillery support was generally provided on a highly responsive basis. The battalion was also supported by 16 flights of F-4B's and 8 flights of A4E's. These aircraft delivered 144 500lb HE bombs, 144 napalm bombs, over 480 Zuni rockets, and over 4,000 rounds of 20mm ammunition and accounted for at least 37 of the NVA killed.

Overall response to medical evacuation requests was good despite the fact that the battalion had to rely solely on in-country sources for helicopter support as a result of the return of the amphibious shipping to Subic Bay while the operation was in progress.

Casualties suffered by friendly and enemy forces were as follows:

U.S. Marine Corps: KIA - 2 Officers, 21 Enlisted; WIA (medevac) - 8 Officers, 116 Enlisted; WIA (not evacuated) - 3 Officers, 21 Enlisted.

U.S. Navy: WIA (medevac) - 5 enlisted; WIA (not evacuated) - 1 enlisted.

Enemy Personnel: KIA - 81 NVA, 39 VC; Detainees - 32.

The results proved the value of a swift reaction to reliable intelligence information. It also showed that an undetected night movement, on foot, is possible on very short notice.

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ENGAGEMENT 39. OPERATION IMPERIAL LAKE, THE FINAL OPERATION OF THE 2ND  
BATTALION, 7TH MARINES IN VIETNAM, QUANG NAM PROVINCE  
AUGUST 1970

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INTRODUCTION

On 20 April 1970 President Nixon announced an additional 150,000 reduction in the authorized U.S. troop strength in Vietnam to be accomplished by 1 May 1971. Of these reductions, a total of 41,800 were to be Marines, which would clear out all Fleet Marine Force Marines from Vietnam. The principal ground unit scheduled to leave in this fourth increment of U.S. troop redeployment was the 7th Marines, which had been located in Que Son valley at two major combat bases, LZ Baldy and FSB Ross, which had been taken over from the U.S. Army on 15 August 1969. It was the area first entered by Marine Corps units in December 1965 in Operation HARVEST MOON.

Although the enemy was more and more avoiding large-scale engagement and limiting itself to terrorist and harassing actions, it still had a capacity for nastiness. The third increment of U.S. redeployment had taken out most of the tracked vehicles remaining to the 1st Marine Division. The III MAF was reduced to a division-wing team, under the operational control of the XXIV Army Corps, with its area of responsibility limited to Quang Nam province. Its overriding mission continued to be that of providing a shield for the populated area of Quang Nam province.

Knowing that further U.S. troop withdrawals from Military Region I were imminent, General Lam, the South Vietnamese Commander, gave much thought in the early summer months to what might well be the last large-scale combined offensive in his military region. With the concurrence of the XXIV Corps Commander he decided on a generally westward attack on a broad front throughout Military Region I into the enemy's base areas. The 7th Marines followed this westward thrust in a supporting operation, PICKENS FOREST, in which the 2nd Battalion made a long helo jump westward

to FSB Hatchet above the Song Cai. The operation ended on 24 August. Contact had been limited but the 7th Marines had found a sizeable number of caches of weapons and supplies.

There was to be one more named operation for the 7th Marines before their redeployment. This commentary covers the efforts of the 2nd Battalion in Operation IMPERIAL LAKE, the fifth in a series in which the battalion was engaged during the Vietnam war where the nature of the operation, the strength and disposition of the enemy, the tactics of the battalion, the element of surprise, the environment, the intensity of the battle, or the nature of the outcome was of sufficient interest to warrant its inclusion in the study of the battalion's effectiveness under different conditions or commanders.

#### UNIT BACKGROUND

The 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines had been trained at Camp Pendleton. It was part of the 1st Marine Division but had arrived ahead of the division. It was a "transplacement" battalion which was deployed to Vietnam in accordance with the peacetime rotation of replacement infantry battalions and aircraft squadrons between the West Coast and the Pacific. Its original mission was security for the port of Qui Nhon until the arrival of the Korean Tiger Division when it returned to its parent regiment located at Chu Lai. The battalion operated at Chu Lai and in the Da Nang area until June 1968 when it embarked on the ships of the Amphibious Ready Group and for a number of months became part of the Special Landing Force of the U.S. Seventh Fleet.

It returned to duty on shore in Vietnam for Operation MAMELUKE THRUST. It participated in the pacification and rural development programs in 1968 and 1969 and was involved in search and destroy type combat operations. It concentrated on an area well south of Da Nang and fanned out from there. With the major rearrangement of areas of operation necessitated by boundary shifts between the 1st Marine Division and the

Americal Division, it was moved into the Que Son Valley in August 1969 where it used LZ Baldy as a base of operations until Operation PICKENS FOREST.

#### GENERAL PREPARATION FOR THE OPERATION

In order to neutralize the Que Son area for the remainder of the 7th Marines' stay in Vietnam, a final operation was planned. Based on the operations orders of the 7th Marine Regiment, the 2nd Battalion laid out a detailed operational plan for the use of artillery fire and air strikes to attempt to fix the enemy in place and then, with one company left in reserve on LZ Baldy, the remainder of the battalion would conduct simultaneous heliborne landings in three LZ's to encircle the enemy for subsequent search and destroy operations within the area in which the enemy was encircled. The detailed operation order was issued by the battalion commander at 0800H on 30 August.

#### Terrain and Weather

The dominant terrain feature of the operational area was the Que Son Mountains. The steep, well-wooded hillsides favored small units attempting to evade a conventional military force. The heavy brush provided good concealment for bunkers and cave openings, while rocky promontories overlooking trails and stream beds provided excellent sniper positions. Water was plentiful in the lower valleys, but practically nonavailable in the highlands. The weather was hot and humid in the lowlands and less so in the higher terrain. Occasional showers in the afternoon were normal.

#### Enemy Forces

The targeted force of the enemy was Front 4, a command group for all enemy units in Quang Nam Province, and assigned Main Force and NVA units in the Que Son Mountains. Three Main Force battalions had been identified: the R20th Infantry Battalion, headquartered in the Que Sons with the main portion of its 175 troops deployed in the lowlands to the north;

the T-89th Sapper Battalion, with similar strength and disposition, and the V-25th Infantry Battalion, numbering approximately 100 men, located in the vicinity of AT9638. The NVA units identified were the 3rd Sapper Battalion, strength 130, positioned around Hill 845, the D.3 Infantry Battalion, approximately 100 men, deployed in the lowlands to the north, while maintaining a headquarters in the Que Sons, and elements of the 160th Transportation Battalion, numbering 150-200 men, the majority of whom were support troops but equipped with weapons normally associated with an infantry battalion. Intelligence estimates indicated that these forces would probably attempt to avoid the sweeping friendly forces, harass advancing units with sniper fire and delaying actions, initiate ambushes and heavy mortar/RPG attacks, and possibly to mass and counter-attack against a specific segment of the advancing troops in order to break through and escape.

#### Planning for the Operation

After completing Operation PICKENS FOREST on 24 August work started on the plans for IMPERIAL LAKE. Operation Order 12-70 was issued by the 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines at 0800H on the 30th with units directed to move at a time and date to be announced. It was initiated with the lifting of the battalion into the ring of landing zones designated by the operation order.

#### Concept of the Operation

Operation IMPERIAL LAKE was planned to be a final assault on the Que Sons, which had long been a safe haven for enemy units in lower Quang Nam Province with the objective of destroying the effectiveness of enemy units located there and disrupting their overall strategy of operation. The operation was to commence with intensive artillery and air strikes on preplanned targets and the coordinated preparation of LZ's by air. Immediately thereafter, a simultaneous helolift of platoon size elements of three companies would insert them into three separate LZ's.

Subsequent to the lift of the companies, the Alpha Command Group would be lifted into LZ Vulture. These initial landings were to be followed by an intensive air strike on a second predesignated target. Following this last fixedwing air strike, Company G, 2/7 would be landed into the zone just prepped by the air strike and three Recon Teams would be landed landed on their OP's (see Map 1).

The overall scheme of maneuver was to position the forces in the area of operations so that they could be quickly redisposed to form an encirclement around any enemy contact and thereby prevent the enemy from breaking contact. The mission assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines was to conduct Category III operations in the Que Son Mountains to locate and destroy the Headquarters of the forward elements of Front 4 and such other NVA/VC forces as were encountered in the objective area.

#### CONDUCT OF THE OPERATION

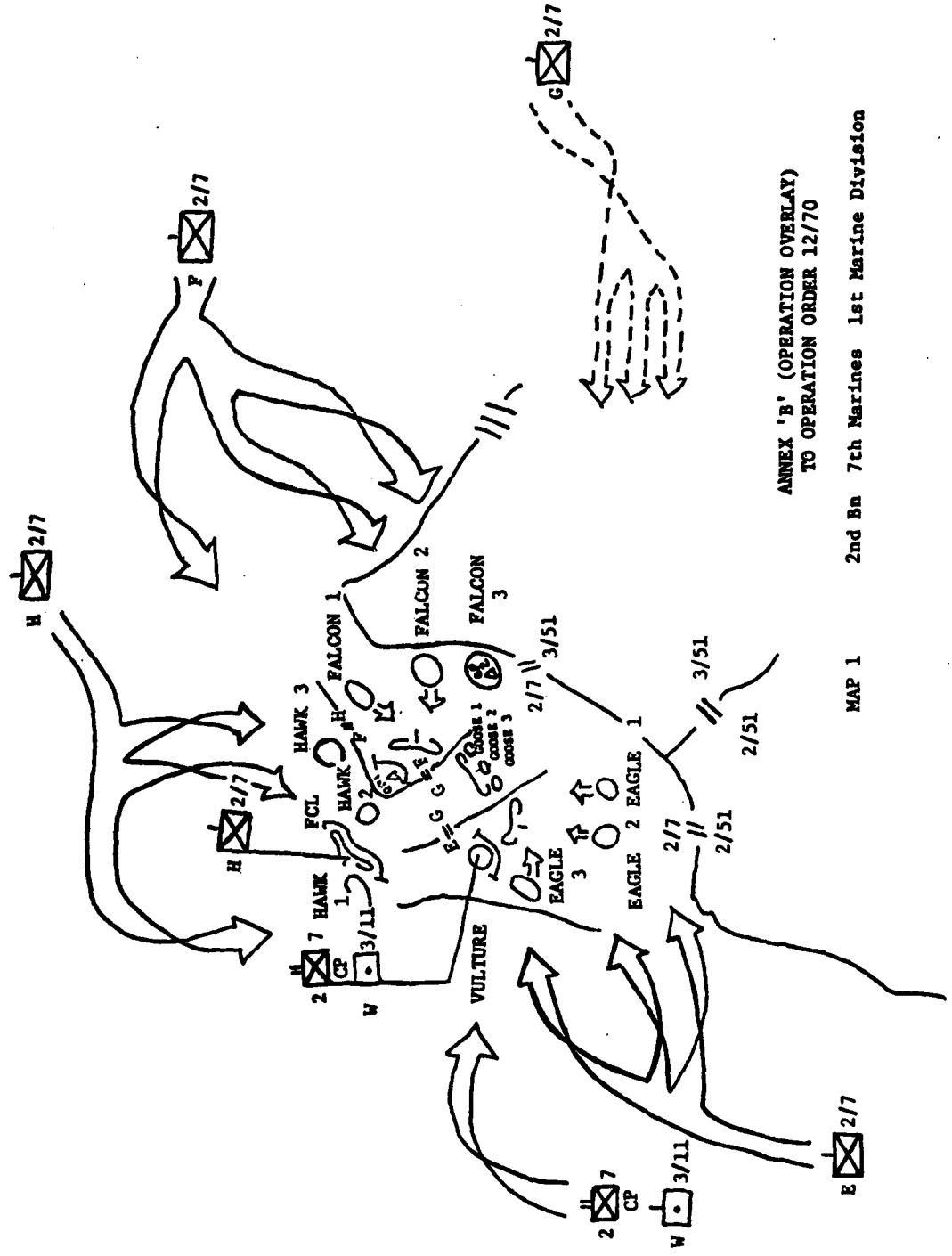
During the night of 30-31 August 1970 the 11th Marines fired an all-night drumfire artillery preparation into the objective area in the Que Sons in which 13,000 rounds were poured onto the planned targets.

#### D-Day, 31 August 1970

Between 0702H and 0928H attack aircraft of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing delivered 77 tons of ordnance, mostly 1,000 pound bombs and napalm, in 27 sorties into the objective area. When this preparation was complete the helilift of the 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines commenced.

#### D+1 - D+4, 1-4 September 1970

During this period, the four rifle companies of 2/7 maneuvered in areas south, east, north, and northeast of Hill 845 (LZ Vulture). All maneuvers during this phase of the operation were reactions to immediate current intelligence being received from the S-2, 7th Marines.



**ANNEX 'B' (OPERATION OVERLAY)**  
TO OPERATION ORDER 12/70

**MAP 1** 2nd Bn 7th Marines 1st Marine Division  
TO OPERATION ORDER 12/70

MAP 1

A-263

D+5, 5 September 1970

While sweeping in a southeasterly direction along the stream in grid square 9844 Company E made contact with an estimated 30-50 man element of the 3rd NVA Battalion Headquarters. The other three rifle companies were immediately maneuvered to form an encirclement around the contact area. Company G took position on the northeast ridge; Company F occupied positions on the east and south. Company H occupied positions on the west. The NVA force was well disposed on both sides of the almost vertical slopes at the southeast end of the draw. The D-3 riflemen used an assortment of small arms including AK-47's, SKS's, and probably M-14 rifles.

D+6, 6 September 1970

The next day, Company E again attempted to maneuver southeastward along the stream but was very effectively delayed by the intense fires of the 3rd NVA Battalion. In order to evacuate casualties to secure LZ's, OV-10's came on station, laid smoke screens, and fired suppressive fires on enemy positions. This permitted the casualties to be evacuated and Company E to maneuver into night encirclement positions.

D+7, 7 September 1970

On 7 September a new attack plan was executed. Company F(-) made the main attack by attacking in a northeasterly direction down the southwest ridge of the draw. Company G(-) made the supporting attack by attacking southwestward down the northeast ridge of the draw. This was designed to prevent the enemy force from placing coordinated and interlocking fires on the main attack force. Company E(-) made the diversionary attack by maneuvering in a southeast direction along the stream. Company H(-) served as the Battalion reserve and moved in trace of Company E(-). Because of intense and accurate enemy fire which delayed the movement of Company G(-), OV-10's again were employed to suppress fires and lay

smoke to cover the evacuation of wounded. Company G(-) also very successfully used fire and maneuver to redispouse units into encirclement positions for the night.

D+8, 8 September 1970

On 8 September the same attack plan was employed with Company F(-) attacking to the northeast but from a different LOD. Again the attack was delayed by intense and accurate enemy fire. In view of this, all units were maneuvered into well-protected encirclement positions on the night of 8 September.

D+9, 9 September 1970

On 9 September, 86,000 lbs of aircraft ordnance from 9 fixed-wing air strikes was dropped onto the contact area. This rearranged the terrain considerably and caused five secondary explosions. After an on-the-ground assessment of the damage by the Commanding Officer, 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines and interviews with Company Commanders, it was determined that a minimum of 6 caves from which snipers had been firing were sealed or destroyed by the air strikes. It is further estimated that as a minimum each cave had 3 NVA snipers, resulting in 18 NVA KIA as a direct result of the 9 September air strikes. After the air strikes on 9 September effective resistance in the contact area ceased.

D+10, 10 September 1970

On 10 September, the 3rd Platoon, Company F maneuvered into the contact area in a northwesterly direction from southeast entrance to the draw. F-3 came under sniper fire but this time only from an estimated 5-8 snipers as compared to 30-50 during the period 5 September through 8 September. Because of the terrain and snipers, F-3's movement was slow. Company E(-) was moved further to the southeast to tighten the encirclement. F-3 remained in the draw, ambushing possible escape routes on the night of 10 September.

D+11, 11 September 1970

On 11 September, F-3 discovered a cave with at least 3 NVA in it. The cave was fragged, fired on with flame throwers, and ambushed throughout the night of 11 September. F(-) also moved into the draw late on 11 September. The Commanding Officer, 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines and the Battalion Medical Officer moved to the F(-) Command Post, established a forward aid station, and administered emergency treatment to the WIA's. This action resulted in the saving of the lives of these two Marines.

Company E spotted an NVA sniper, fired at him, and saw him fall. When the area was searched at first light, Company E discovered one AK-47 and many blood trails. The enemy snipers were expert riflemen and succeeded in killing 3 Marines and wounding 12 during the period 5 September through 11 September. The NVA force also took all medevac helo's under intense fire, resulting in three helos being forced into emergency landings. Seven received sufficient hits to force them to abort medevac attempts.

D+12 - D+13, 12-13 September 1970

On 12 September, Company E(-) was moved further southeast and a linkup with F(-) was effected. Only sporadic sniper fire was received throughout the day. The cave discovered by F-3 on 11 September was entered. It had been sealed up about 50 meters from the entrance and the 3 NVA were obviously inside an inner cavern since all the 4 exits had been under constant observation by F-3. This cave was destroyed resulting in 3 NVA KIA. Another two-level cave was discovered by Company E, and this was destroyed sealing 1 NVA inside who fired upon the demolition party. No further contact was made in the draw on 12 or 13 September.

D+14 - D+18, 14-18 September 1970

On 14 September, a new scheme of maneuver was executed. Instead of chasing the elusive enemy, the Battalion ambushed the maximum number of

known enemy movement routes, operating areas, and water points. Day ambush patrols moved out before dawn and were in position before daylight. Ambushes remained in place until dark with no activity permitted. Likewise night ambushes were moved into position under the cover of darkness and were withdrawn before dawn. A minimum number of moving patrols were employed after 14 September.

On 16 September, a Chieu Hoi led Company F to the base camp of the 1st Company, 91st Sapper Battalion, and on 17 September to the base camp of 5th Company, 91st Sapper Battalion. Both were subsequently destroyed. Also on 17 September, Company G discovered the base camp of an unidentified VC/NVA unit and subsequently destroyed it.

On 18 September, Company G apprehended a Chieu Hoi who provided a considerable amount of intelligence. This date also marked the initial phase down of forces with the return of Company H to LZ Baldy for rehabilitation.

D+19 - D+23 September 1970

On 20 September, a patrol from the Battalion Command Group discovered a vast cave complex and apprehended two Chieu Hois. This cave complex was subsequently identified as the Command Headquarters for the Duy Xuyen District Unit and the Duy Xuyen District Unit Hospital. The two Hoi Chanhs were corpsman at this hospital. They informed U.S. interrogators that four VC were killed by air strikes during the preparatory fires and that the damage wreaked upon the complex by the air strikes caused the VC forces in the complex to flee from the area.

On 22 September, the operation was further phased down with the relocation of Company F to LZ Baldy. On 23 September, Company G and the Battalion Command Group were relocated to LZ Baldy, leaving only Company E operating in the "Imperial Lake" AO. A significant find on 23 September was a new Chinese Communist multiband, multifrequency radio receiver

transmitter unit along with a Chinese Communist RPD light machine gun, both in a recently abandoned cave complex.

During the period 14 September through 30 September, the saturation ambush/ "duck-hunter" scheme of maneuver proved successful with 11 NVA and 3 VC killed and 3 Chieu Hois apprehended.

#### RESULTS

During Operation IMPERIAL LAKE, the major portion of the enemy contacts were from harassing small arms fire, grenade throwing incidents, and rocket and mortar attacks. Although the casualties inflicted on the enemy were not great from 2/7's actions, they were significant. The 3rd NVA Battalion Headquarters was rendered ineffective with the killing of its four senior commanders and the total destruction of the command cave complex.

The total tally of enemy casualties amounted to 26 NVA KIA (confirmed), 19 NVA KIA (probable), 6 VC KIA (confirmed), 4 VC KIA (probable), an undetermined number of NVA/VC wounded who escaped, 36 detainees, and 3 Chieu Hoi. This was accomplished with only 4 Marines KIA, 47 WIA and evacuated, and 7 wounded who were not evacuated. There were 137 nonbattle casualties during the period.

A great deal of very valuable intelligence was obtained both from captured documents and by interrogation of Hoi Chanhs. In addition to revealing the entire VC/NVA infrastructure in the Quang Nam Province and rendering it ineffective, it also totally disrupted the overall strategy of the enemy units operating in the Que Son Mountains so that they were effectively neutralized for the remainder of the 1st Marine Division's stay in Vietnam.

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**ENGAGEMENT 40. OPERATION TEXAS - A USMC/ARVN/VIETNAMESE MARINE CORPS REACTION FORCE OPERATION TO RETAKE AN HOA OUTPOST IN QUANG NGAI PROVINCE PARTICIPATED IN BY THE 3RD BATTALION, 7TH MARINES, VIETNAM, 1966**

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**INTRODUCTION**

During the latter part of March 1966, after Task Force Delta had destroyed about one-third of the original strength of the 36th Regiment, 308th Division, North Vietnamese Army in Operation UTAH, it again tangled with the VC in northern Quang Ngai Province. The extreme northwestern portion of Binh Son District and Son Tinh District continued to be trouble spots. The 36th Regiment, though battered, was still located near the Chau Nhai hamlet complex, and elements of the 1st VC Regiment were also active in the general vicinity.

Unknown to American intelligence at that time, individual battalions of the 5th VC Regiment which had been operating near Da Nang were also moving into the Binh Son/Son Tinh area. During the night of 18/19 March, an enemy force of unknown size made its presence known by overrunning An Hoa, an outpost 30 kilometers northwest of Quang Ngai, garrisoned by a South Vietnamese Regional Force company. This attack triggered another coordinated Marine/ARVN effort, Operation TEXAS, in which three U.S. Marine battalions were involved. This commentary covers the efforts of the 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines in the operation as one of a series in which the nature of the operation, the strength and disposition of the enemy, the tactics of the battalion, the element of surprise, the environment, the intensity of the battle, or the nature of the outcome was of sufficient significance to warrant its inclusion in the study of the effectiveness of USMC battalions in combat situations.

**UNIT BACKGROUND**

The 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines had been located at Camp Pendleton as part of the 1st Marine Division until 24 May 1965 when it departed with the

balance of the regiment for service in South Vietnam. It had been additionally trained and augmented to serve as the Seventh Fleet's Special Landing Force as BLT 3/7. Supported by Marine helicopter squadron HMM-163 it went ashore at Qui Nhon on 1 July 1965. After a week ashore it was relieved by BLT 2/7 and went back aboard its amphibious shipping to reconstitute the Special Landing Force.

After remaining off shore for a short time it sailed for Subic Bay but was diverted to assist in salvage operations on the USS Frank Knox (DDR 742) near Pratas Island. After a shore leave in Hong Kong it returned to the Philippines for "live fire" and survival training exercises and then returned to Vietnam to participate in Operation STARLITE. After maintenance of its equipment it arrived at Chu Lai on 31 August. During September 1966 3/7 participated in Operation PIRANHA, but from 1 October to the end of February its principal mission was aggressive deep patrolling around the Chu Lai TAOR, except for a few minor search and clear operations such as QUICK DRAW, HERCULES, and MALLARD. Although all of the company commanders had been replaced, 3/7 was still under its original Battalion Commander and Executive Officer.

#### PREPARATION FOR THE OPERATION

The Communist attack on the night of 18/19 March 1966 was launched against the 936th Regional Forces Company (ARVN) located about 8,000 meters west-northwest of the area in which Operation UTAH had been conducted during the first few days of the month. The RF perimeter encompassed Hill 141, one of several peaks which dominated a long ridgeline. The outpost was 1,800 meters south of the Tra Bong River and overlooked the widespread Vinh Tuy village which carpeted the valley to the southeast, south, and southwest of the hill. The VC overran the outpost shortly after midnight. The next morning aerial observation spotted 25-30 bodies on the hilltop; there was no sign of life. A two-company force from the 2nd ARVN Division was dispatched to the scene in Marine helicopters.

The UH-34's settled into a small LZ about 200 meters southwest of the former outpost, but because of the narrow ridgeline only two helicopters could get into the zone at the same time. As they began to land, the base of the hill erupted with fire from .50 cal machine guns, automatic weapons, and small arms. The VC had not withdrawn after overrunning the outpost. Only 30 South Vietnamese managed to disembark in the cramped LZ and they were shortly halted by the intense fire. With considerable difficulty, the Marine pilots returned to the LZ and retracted the out-numbered and outgunned ARVN; four UH-34's were hit in the process.

As in the case of Operation UTAH, the 7th Marine Regiment received the call for help from the ARVN and initially controlled the operation. As it expanded, however, Task Force DELTA took over command. The Marine units involved were the three infantry battalions, 3/7, 2/4, and 3/1, the latter two having previously operated together under Task Force DELTA. This experience enabled the Marines to move out with a minimum of planning and coordination.

The CO, 7th Marine Regiment realized that time was of the essence. In spite of the enemy's brief stand on Hill 141, it was unlikely that it would attempt to hold that ground for any length of time, especially against a vastly superior force. The Marine planners estimated that the VC would withdraw toward the west and seek refuge in that mountainous area. The 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines was alerted for a helilift into the path of the withdrawing force.

#### Terrain and Weather

The most critical terrain in the area of Operation TEXAS was Hill No. 23, (vic BS 5677) which overlooked the village of Phuoc Loc (1) and the defensive positions which had been developed in and around the village itself. Observation from the hill was good in all directions, although there was heavy vegetation toward the top of the hill. On the lower

slopes the visibility was good. There were flat areas west, north, and east of Hill No. 23, broken up by small clusters of houses, cane fields, and hedgerows. The area between Hill No. 23 and Phuoc Loc was open and provided good observation and fields of fire. The hedgerows and water-filled rice paddies were natural obstacles which hampered foot movement. Man-made obstacles consisting of bamboo and wire fences were integrated into the defensive perimeter and the extensive trench system around Phuoc Loc.

Weather during the course of the operation was generally excellent, with clear skies and broken clouds at 2000-3000 feet, which presented no problem to air and infantry operations. The temperature ranged from the low 70's at night to the mid-90's at noon. The humidity caused heat casualties, however, among some recent arrivals in Vietnam.

#### Enemy Forces

Prior to the entry of the U.S. Marine and ARVN forces into the objective area on D-Day, it was estimated that the enemy force, which had attacked the An Hoa outpost, was composed of elements of the 36th NVA Regiment. The Regiment was made up of portions of the 11th, 22nd, and 33rd Battalions, plus elements of the 195th AA Bn, armed with .50 caliber AA machine guns. Although major VC forces were encountered during the operation, the 36th NVA Regiment was not in the engagement. Positive identification was made of the 65th Battalion, 5th Regiment plus a second battalion which occupied and defended the eastern portion of the Phuoc Loc village complex.

#### Planning for the Operation

After the ARVN outpost in the vicinity of An Hoa was overrun by an estimated VC battalion force, the 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines was placed on a six-hour alert status. This order was received at 191800H. At approximately 192230H a planning conference was held at the headquarters of the Assistant Division Commander by the Task Force DELTA staff. By 200130H

detail planning by the 3/7 Battalion Staff was underway and Frag Order 5-66 was published by 200500H. At 200930H 3/7 commenced its helilift into the objective area. The speed with which the Marine units were alerted and committed to this action was one of the noteworthy features of Operation TEXAS.

#### Concept of the Operation

The mission assigned to the 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines initially was to conduct a heliborne landing in conjunction with the 5th ARVN Airborne Battalion to LZ Quail some 3,500 meters west of Hill 141 where the ill-fated RF outpost had been. After securing the LZ the assault force was to sweep to the east and southeast, conducting a search and destroy operation of the Binh Hoa Hamlet complex/An Hoa hill complex. The Marine assault force consisted of Companies I, K, and L, two sections of 81mm mortars, and the 3/7 Battalion Command Group. Meanwhile, Company M, 3/7 provided ground convoy escort for the 3rd Battalion, 11th Marines Artillery and the 7th Marines Regimental Headquarters Group.

#### INITIAL PHASE OF THE OPERATION

##### D-Day, 20 March 1966

At 200930H the 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines (-) (Rein) and the 5th ARVN Airborne Battalion of the 2nd Division were helilifted to LZ Quail some 3,500 meters west of Hill 141. Upon landing the zone was secured by Company L. Company K landed second and moved to sweep the village complex apprehending 10 VC in the hamlet of Nhon Hoa (1) (BS 447869). Company I moved to and established an assembly area in the vicinity of BS 430867. The Command Group established the CP at BS 432866. By 201130H all elements had arrived in the Landing Zone. No enemy resistance was encountered during the lift or in the landing. As the Marines and the South Vietnamese began to sweep in an easterly direction, it became apparent that if the VC had headed west after attacking An Hoa, the Allied reaction force was too late to intercept them.

Later in the afternoon, Company I, 3/7, and a section of 81mm mortars were helilifted to the captured RF outpost. The Marines moved out from the LZ and cautiously approached the perimeter but they received no fire; the enemy was gone. The company searched the area and discovered the bodies of 31 South Vietnamese. There were no enemy dead, but the usually tidy VC had failed to carry off a large amount of ammunition. The Marines gathered up seven weapons and over 50,000 rounds of small arms ammunition.

When the CO, 7th Marines committed 3/7, he also alerted the 2nd Bn, 4th Marines in case the former made significant contact. However, 3/7 had not located the fleeing enemy force; the VC had apparently made good their escape into the mountains. But there was another possibility. Maybe the VC had done just the opposite of the obvious; instead of heading into the highlands, as was their normal practice, perhaps they had moved eastward into the populated area, namely the Vin Tuy, Thach An Noi, and Phuong Dinh complex (see map). After studying the possibility, the CO 7th Marines, along with the Senior Advisor to the 2d ARVN Division, flew to Quang Ngai with a new scheme of maneuver for the ARVN area commander's approval. The Marines proposed that 3/7 reverse its course and drive eastward through the Vin Tuy Valley. In the meantime, 2/4 would move by helicopter into an LZ near Phuong Dinh (2), consolidate, and wait for 3/7 to arrive. The two battalions would then join up and push eastward on line to Route 1. If the VC were in this area, the Marines would find them. General Lam agreed to the idea and the American officers flew back to the 7th Marines CP. On the return trip, they selected a suitable LZ west of Phuong Dinh (2).

#### OPERATION UNDER THE REVISED CONCEPT

D+1, 21 March 1966

At 0845 the next day, the lead elements of 2/4 were helilifted into the objective area. From the start, it was apparent that the Marines had

located the enemy's main body. The LZ was subjected to heavy fire throughout the landing with the center of resistance at Phuong Dinh (2), 500 meters to the east. In fact, the Marines had found the headquarters of the 1st VC Regiment defended by one battalion and two engineer companies for a total of around 600 enemy troops in well fortified positions. With attachments, 2/4 had exactly 556 men. The VC had hidden in tunnels and camouflaged trenchlines during the heavy prep fires, then quickly emerged from cover to man their positions at the last moment. Despite the determined enemy resistance, 2/4 pressed the attack throughout the day. The situation eventually resulted in the commitment of a third Marine battalion. In the meantime, the men of 2/4 held their positions while artillery and air strikes saturated the hamlet and escape routes throughout the night.

While 2/4 was heavily engaged, 3/7 had proceeded eastward from its night time positions and advanced toward the hamlet of Thach An Noi (1) which was roughly 1,000 meters north of Phuong Dinh (2). At 1515 the Marines began to receive sporadic resistance which, as 3/7 advanced, grew to a heavy volume of automatic weapons fire. Simultaneously, enemy snipers to the rear and flanks opened up. The Marines of 3/7 had made contact with an estimated two-company force from the 65th Battalion, 5th VC Regiment; as at Phuong Dinh (2), the enemy troops fought from prepared positions and showed a high degree of discipline. Due to an overcrowded radio net, the battalion commander was unable to get immediate air or artillery strikes on target; after approximately three hours of close fighting the VC broke contact and fled to the north. While the Marines located only five enemy bodies, they saw several dozen more fall, but the heavy covering fire permitted the VC to retrieve most of their dead and wounded.

By late afternoon, the 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines, reinforced by the 2d Strike company, 3d ARVN Division, was also in action. Shortly after 2/4 reported making heavy contact, the 7th Marines commander committed the additional forces, designating Xuan Hoa as the target area, some 1,500 meters southeast of Phuong Dinh (2). The helilift commenced at 1600

and after securing the landing zone, the Marines and ARVN became heavily engaged on the outskirts of the hamlet.

This time, however, the Allies met a smaller enemy force, an estimated three platoons. After two hours of fighting, the pressure from 3/1 became too much for the VC and they fled. Marine artillery and Huey gunships inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy troops as they retreated from the hamlet. By nightfall, 3/1 had advanced 150 meters into the hamlet; the 2d Strike Company had also secured its objective and established roadblocks along the main route leading from Xuan Hoa.

D+2, 22 March 1966

The following morning, all three Marine battalions advanced with only light contact. As usual, the Viet Cong had withdrawn during the night. The Marines cleared the hamlets, and then set about destroying fortifications, gathering up the spoils of war, and counting enemy dead. In 3/7's sector this last task was the easiest because the VC had successfully hauled off most of their casualties.

At 221030H Companies I and K commenced a sweep from BS 503837 to Phase Line RED vicinity coordinates BS 521837. At 221245H the rear elements of Company K and Company I were taken under fire. Both companies returned fire. Company K killed two VC but were unable to locate their weapons. Company K suffered one WIA and two heat casualties.

At 221200H Company L swept north to the hamlet complex located at BS 504849. At BS 501851 Company L spotted 10 to 15 VC in khaki uniforms crossing a rice paddy. An artillery mission was called. A search of the area failed to reveal any evidence of VC casualties.

THE PRINCIPAL ENGAGEMENT

The climax to Operation TEXAS came on the evening of the 22nd and again 3/7 was a key participant. The battalion departed Thach An Noi on the

afternoon following its bloody fight there and moved by helo to another area of enemy activity. The new objective was Phuoc Loc (1) hamlet some 9,000 meters to the southeast.

At first glance, it would appear that the VC in Phuoc Loc had not chosen the most ideal spot to make a stand. To be sure, the hamlet itself provided more than adequate cover but the avenues of egress, so vitally important to the light-footed Viet Cong, left a lot to be desired. Phuoc Loc (1) was bordered on the north by Hill 23 which turned out to be the Marines' LZ; with three U.S. companies advancing from the north, there would be little chance of escape in that direction. The eastern and western flanks of the hamlet were marshy flatlands and any VC attempting to cross them during daylight would become easy prey for Marine gunships, fighter/bombers, and artillery. Finally, the hamlet's southern boundary was the 300 meter-wide Tra Khuc River; any VC fleeing to the south would have to use sampans or swim.

By 1815, 3/7 had arrived on Hill 23; Companies L and K quickly moved on line and began to advance on Phuoc Loc (1). Company I set up blocking positions to the west and remained in place as the battalion reserve. Within 15 minutes, the Marines were locked in another extremely bitter fire fight. Although identification of the VC units was not confirmed, the S-2 of 3/7 later estimated that there were at least two reinforced battalions -- probably the 60th and 21st of the 5th VC Regiment -- entrenched in Phuoc Loc. The Communists had prepared heavily fortified positions along the northern edge of the hamlet and kicked off the battle with a tremendous opening volley along a 1,000-meter front. Small arms, machine gun, and recoilless rifle fire tore into the advancing Marines, while exploding mortar rounds splattered the paddies with fragments. At the same time the enemy soldiers in the hamlet opened up; a dozen snipers located in treetops to the Marines' flank cut loose on the battalion CP. These rounds scattered the command group and resulted in the temporary disruption of normal command functions during the early

minutes of the fight. A group of engineers attached to Company K responded quickly, knocked four of the VC from their perches, and the fire from that quarter slackened considerably.

To the front, the going continued to be tough. Company K fell into a trap of sorts which resulted in several casualties. Just prior to the opening fusillade, the right flank platoon, which was moving over relatively open ground, crossed a shallow trench that ran at an oblique from the eastern edge of the hamlet. When the first mortar rounds began to impact, several men dived headlong into the small depression for cover but the VC had anticipated this reaction and positioned a .50 caliber machine gun at one end. Firing straight down the long axis of the trench, the enemy gunners wounded five Marines in a matter of seconds. Machine guns, however, have a way of attracting unwanted attention in a fire fight, and the Marines silenced the gun before it caused further damage.

Heavy fighting raged until after dark but the Marines were unable to penetrate the barrier on the northern outskirts of the hamlet. The VC commander was obviously well schooled in the art of preparing defensive positions; his fortifications were emplaced in depth and were mutually supporting. Machine guns and automatic weapon sites were situated so that the gunners could cover the areas to the north with interlocking bands of grazing fire. Bamboo and barbed wire obstacles were used to channel the attackers into the most effective killing zones. The VC had cleared excellent fields of fire and registered their mortars on the few defilade spots where the Marines could escape the searing rifle and machine gun fire. The enemy also showed a high degree of skill in coordinating and controlling its firepower. When a few Marines bunched up to drag a wounded comrade to safety, the VC would quickly concentrate their fire on that one lucrative target and then, just as quickly, shift back to wide front coverage.

Almost immediately after the battle was joined, FOs and FACs attached to the Marine rifle companies had fire requests on the way to their various

components. While 3/7 had experienced communication problems the previous day, the air and artillery response on that evening was immediate and accurate. The 3/11 and 4/11 batteries at Binh Son plotted 15 targets in the Phuoc Loc area and plastered them throughout the night. This deluge included 2,000 155mm rounds which ripped into the hamlet, tossing huts into the air like so much confetti. Marine jets from MAG-11 and -12 streaked in when the artillery was not active and raked the objective with 250-pound bombs, rockets, and 20mm cannon fire.

The rifle companies used the supporting fire to cover the extraction of their casualties from the front. Companies K and L had suffered 11 killed and 27 wounded in the fighting at Phuoc Loc but it was still some time before the wounded were evacuated.

D+3, 23 March 1966

Enemy fire prevented medevac choppers from getting into the battalion's LZ before 0330 the next morning. Even the reserve company took casualties during the engagement. The men of Company I who were well to the rear of the main fighting received a 40-round mortar barrage during the night; many of the projectiles detonated in trees above their foxholes. The resulting airbursts peppered the men with shell fragments and wood splinters and 25 Marines were wounded, 15 requiring evacuation. All but one were walking wounded, and all were evacuated by 230730H. Meanwhile, artillery and counter-mortar fire had been immediately returned on the suspected enemy position with excellent results.

At 231015H Company M was detached as the Task Force Reserve and helilifted into the objective area. Company L was helilifted to the vicinity of the artillery group and assumed the mission as Task Force Reserve/Artillery Group Security. The helilift was completed at 231230H. At 231230H Companies M and K commenced a sweep from the Battalion CP to the Phuoc Loc hamlet complex. While moving into position to commence

the sweep both elements were delayed by heat casualties (newly joined replacements) that required medical evacuation plus a requirement to provide a security element for a downed helicopter. At 231330H, Company I was dispatched to BS 563772 to establish a blocking position for Companies K and M. Companies K and M entered the hamlet from the east and swept to Phase Line 1 (vicinity BS 563766) and by 231845H established night time positions (vicinity BS 566766). At 231700H Company I commenced sweeping east toward Phase Line No. 2 (vicinity BS 557767). Company I established night positions at BS 558767. There was no enemy activity during the night.

D+4, 24 March 1966

At 240700H Companies I, K, and M continued their search mission, but there was little enemy contact. The hamlet complex was secured by 0800H and the Battalion CP moved in to take a hard look at what they had run up against two days before.

Like Phuong Dinh (2), Phuoc Loc was a veritable fortress. There were about 300 small fighting holes, roughly 3 feet wide by 4 feet deep, which were situated along the major approaches from the north. Some of these were covered by a 4-inch thick layer of bamboo with dirt and foliage piled on top. The trench system, however, was the main line of resistance. There were approximately 5,500 meters of trenchline covered by hedgerows and barbed wire which encircled the hamlet in two separate rings. The outer one was zig-zagged to afford blast protection and to prevent an attacker from leaping into the trench and firing down the long axis. The network was dotted with emplacements which provided overhead cover and parapets for crew-served weapons. There were also numerous positions for individual riflemen. Lateral trenches connected the outer ring with a smaller one which was deep inside the village and encompassed the enemy CP. In addition, the Marines discovered two extensive tunnel systems which totaled about 850 meters of underground passageways and living quarters. The tunnels were about 10 feet under

the surface and in some areas passed within a few feet of the trenches. This way, if a VC were trapped above ground, he could burrow into an adjoining tunnel and make good his escape.

#### AFTERMATH OF THE ENGAGEMENT

The men of 3/7 spent the better part of two days interrogating the local villagers and destroying the enemy fortifications. With the assistance of an ARVN intelligence officer from Quang Ngai and a few National Police-men who served as interpreters, the Marines queried some 300 peasants concerning the battle. The Marines learned that the main enemy unit had split into two groups during the night of the 23rd; one crossed the Tra Khuc River by boat, while the other filtered out to the west under the cover of darkness. On the 25th, the men of 3/7 completed their interrogation. With the assistance of Company C (-), 1st Engineer Battalion they blew up the enemy fortifications and then climbed aboard trucks for the return trip to Chu Lai. By 251705H all battalion elements were re-tracked.

#### RESULTS OF THE OPERATION

The initial mission of relief and pursuit of the attacking VC force designed to provide immediate assistance to an RF outpost overrun by an estimated Main Force Battalion was accomplished in the reestablishment of control of the outpost by the RF. This initial mission was expanded as the concept of operation was widened after approval by the ARVN Area Commander. The most significant feature of Operation TEXAS was the nature of the opposition encountered and the type and extent of their defensive fortifications and emplacements. The three most significant engagements of the operation, two of which involved the 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines, took place in fortified hamlets, indicating that in the hard fighting which was taking place in the spring 1966 the VC were more likely to defend the populated low-lying areas rather than adopting the classical concept of defense of prominent "high ground" terrain.

Battalions from two regiments were committed to Operation TEXAS on very short notice, with a minimum of detailed planning, and yet experienced only minor problems in the functions of command and control, administration and logistics. This successful result can probably be largely attributed to the fact that all these units had previously operated together under Task Force Delta and the manner in which functions were performed was familiar to the participating units.

In the battle for the hamlet of Phuoc Loc, the 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines searched out, fixed, and severely damaged the fighting capabilities of a Main Force Battalion and a North Vietnamese Battalion. In addition, a heavily fortified and tunneled complex used by one or more Main Force VC Battalions was discovered and occupied and all positions, barriers, tunnels, and caves destroyed.

During the course of this operation and its three major engagements with enemy forces, 3/7 inflicted heavy casualties on the VC. There were 72 confirmed VC KIA, with an estimated 155 additional KIA carried off by the VC; an estimated 200 VC WIA, and 49 taken prisoner (10 confirmed VC, 39 suspected VC). The enemy lost individual weapons and equipment and about 7-1/2 tons of rice which was evacuated. There were 15 Marines KIA and 100 WIA. Of the latter, 77 required evacuation.

The operation also significantly confirmed the identity of several enemy units in the Son Tinh District -- the 21st NVA Regiment, 60th and 70th Battalions, 1st VC Regiment, and the 195th AA Battalion.

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ENGAGEMENT 41. OPERATION BUFFALO - FIRST PHASE, A SHORT, VIOLENT ENGAGEMENT PARTICIPATED IN BY THE 1ST BATTALION, 9TH MARINES IN QUANG TRI PROVINCE, RVN, JULY 1967

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INTRODUCTION

During spring 1967 in parts of Quang Tri Province other than Khe Sanh and its surrounding areas Operation CIMARRON had gone on with five Marine Battalions involved. During its course, a "firebreak" 600 meters wide and 13.5 kilometers long was cut from Con Thien through Gio Linh to the sea. The plan was to develop this cleared area, skinned of all significant vegetation by 10,000 man-hours and 5,000 tractor-hours effort put in by the 11th Engineer Battalion, into a major obstacle to troop movement, using barbed wire, minefields, sensors, watchtowers, and strong points.

The 1st Battalion, 9th Marines CP was located in the perimeter of Con Thien as the month of July 1967 began. It was responsible for defending the perimeter, searching and destroying operations within its area of operations, and securing the MSR (Route 561) within that area. Two of its companies, "A" and "B," were operating northwest, north, and northeast of Con Thien. The hill mass on which this outpost was located was important to the Communists as a strategic terrain feature. As time passed and blood was shed in prodigious amounts for this piece of terrain, it became symbolically important to them too. It was a beleaguered fortress, much like Khe Sanh in early 1968, although it never received the publicity that Khe Sanh did.

It was in this environment that Operation BUFFALO had its fateful beginning with the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines first bearing the brunt of the action.

### UNIT BACKGROUND

The 1st Battalion, 9th Marines landed at Da Nang on 17 June 1965 and assumed responsibility for the close-in security of the base, relieving the 3rd Battalion, 9th Marines which was at the end of its Western Pacific tour under the "transplacement" system then in effect. The mission of defense of the air base at Da Nang was regarded by General Walt as his first and most important mission. Despite the availability of the Marines, the Vietnamese commander had been reluctant to permit them to operate in heavily populated areas. However, on 1 July the almost inevitable happened. A Viet Cong demolitions squad got through the barbed wire and onto the flight line where they damaged and destroyed a number of aircraft. They made their approach through the heavily populated area south and east of the field where the ARVN was responsible for security. The Marines' area of responsibility was thus expanded, and the 1st Battalion was joined by the Headquarters, 9th Marines and its 2nd Battalion.

The 1st Battalion remained in the vicinity of Da Nang and Marble Mountain, defending the air field until February 1966 when it was designated the air defense battalion for Da Nang. In May 1966 it became involved in pacification operations and was occupied with saturation patrolling in the Da Nang area. It was a part of a "Country Fair" effort to get at the Viet Cong. Beginning in June 1966 it became involved in several major operations, including LIBERTY, MACON, and WILCOX, and early in September it was given responsibility for the northern part of the 9th Marines TAOR.

On 28 September 1966 it returned to Okinawa and was engaged in intensive training there and in the Philippines until December 1966. It sailed again for Vietnam on 29 December as a Battalion Landing Team of the 7th Fleet. It was on and off shore in Vietnam in several amphibious and heliborne operations for the first 3 months of 1967 and then in four different areas of operation during April. It participated in search and destroy

operations, notably BIG HORN and PRAIRIE IV. In May it was located at Dong Ha combat base, then in the field against the NVA north of Cam Lo, and finally located at Con Thien. In June it participated in one major operation, CIMARRON, in and around Con Thien and east to Gio Linh. On 22 June a new Battalion Commander was assigned.

#### GENERAL PREPARATION FOR THE OPERATION

As Operation CIMARRON was coming to a close, there was a build up of intelligence information that the enemy would undertake offensive action during the period 3-14 July 1967. Aerial observers had increased sightings in the DMZ area, patrols around Con Thien were having increased contacts, and a build up of enemy artillery and anti-aircraft weapons was detected in the area north of the Ben Hai River. In addition, the S-2, 2nd ARVN Regiment advised that the enemy had a five year history of conducting offensive operations during that period of the year. To investigate this intelligence a battalion, minus, swept the area north and east of Con Thien to the market area a week prior to Operation BUFFALO. That battalion encountered only small reconnaissance units. A few days later, two companies from 1/9 swept a portion of the area again and found indications that a stronger force than previously encountered was sliding into the area. As a result, Companies A and B were reinserted the following day and triggered Operation BUFFALO.

#### Terrain and Weather

The principal terrain feature was the hill mass on which Con Thien was located. It was only 158 meters high but commanded an excellent view of the surrounding countryside including the Marine logistics base at Dong Ha to the southeast. The hill itself was only large enough to accommodate a reinforced battalion. It was the location of the CP of the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines during Operation BUFFALO. In the surrounding countryside extensive enemy bunkers and trench lines existed. In the opening contact

of the operation the enemy fought from positions prepared in improved drainage ditches and used hedgerows and bushes for concealment.

The weather was hot and humid. There were gusty winds during daylight hours which at times grounded the helicopter support except for emergency medical evacuations.

#### Enemy Forces

Inspection of the bodies of the enemy that had been killed in the Gia Binh area 2, 3, and 4 days before commencement of the operation revealed that a new NVA regiment, the 90th, had moved into the area surrounding Con Thien. They were dressed in new uniforms and had new equipment. All enemy bodies that had been recovered during that period had home-made gas masks included with their equipment. The estimated strength of the 90th NVA Regiment was 2,400. In addition one battalion of the 803rd Regiment, strength 700 was located NW of Con Thien in the southern DMZ; the 29th Regiment(-), strength 1,500, was along the western boundary of 1/9's operating area; the 31st Regiment, strength 2,285, was west of Highway #1; and recon elements of the 812th Regiment, estimated at 200-300, had been identified throughout the operating area. Estimates of enemy capability for reinforcing those forces indicated the 32d Regiment, strength 2,625, in the eastern DMZ, and the remaining units of the 803rd and 812th Regiments totaling approximately 2,200 were north of Con Thien in the DMZ. The "dark of the moon" period of the month coincided with other indications of possible enemy offensive action.

#### Concept of the Operation

The 9th Marine Regiment was operating with the mission and guidance set forth for Operation CIMARRON with the 1st Battalion in and around the Con Thien defense perimeter. Companies A and B were involved in

search and destroy operations north and northeast of Con Thien; Company D, H&S Company and the Battalion Command Group were inside the Con Thien defense perimeter; and Company C was at Dong Ha. The movement of Companies A and B tripped off prematurely an enemy buildup that the NVA had not wanted to reveal at that time. They were infiltrating through the DMZ massing for a large operation against Con Thien, Gio Linh, or Dong Ha. In order to assist the companies initially engaged and to exploit the contact, Operation BUFFALO was launched with the 3rd Battalion, 9th Marines reinforcing by helicopter and both 1/9 and 3/9 attacking north to search and destroy enemy forces which had crossed the DMZ. Subsequently, both SLF Alpha and SLF Bravo joined the fray and expanded the area of conflict (see Map 1).

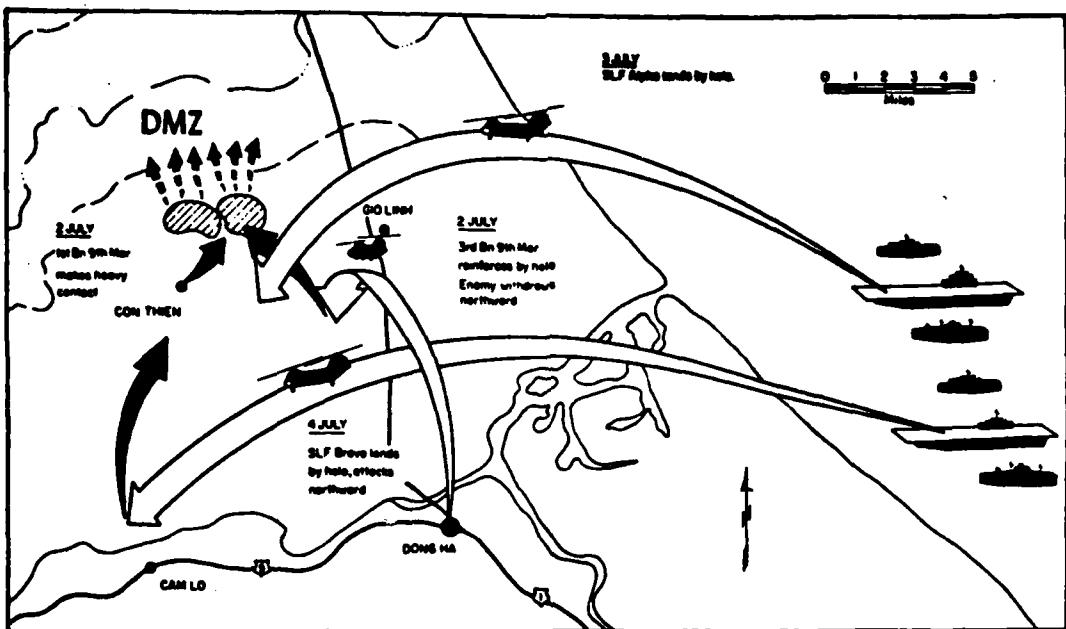
#### THE ENGAGEMENT

##### D-Day, 2 July 1967

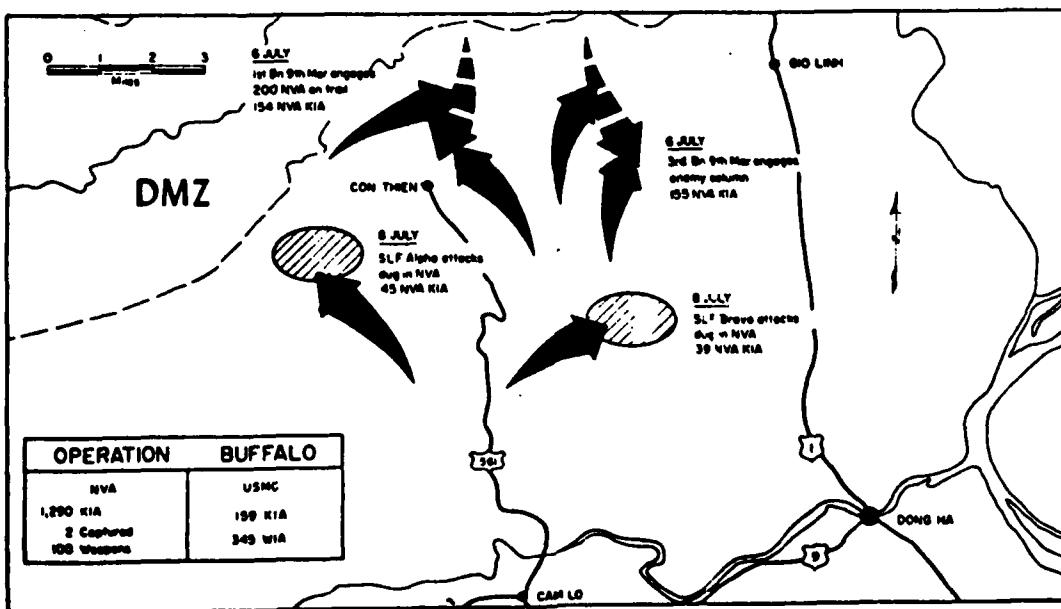
While proceeding in an extended column along a sunken road, Company B began receiving small arms fire in a steadily increasing volume. At the same time (0915H) the enemy fired two command detonated claymore type mines at Company A causing 3 casualties requiring evacuation. This delay resulted in Company A not meeting up with Company B as had been planned for the morning. By 1000H Company B was engaged with what was first assessed as 150 NVA, then a battalion, and ultimately a multi-battalion force of the 90th NVA Regiment. Company A was directed to move east to help out but was unable to effect a link-up after repeated attempts in the face of intense small arms from all sides. The action picked up rapidly and to make matters worse the enemy began pounding the unfortunate Marines with artillery and mortars. This was the first time that the NVA had employed artillery in mass and in close coordination with its ground attack.

Back at Dong Ha, Company C was alerted for helilift into the area of contact as radio transmissions from the beleaguered Marines became grimmer

## OPERATION BUFFALO 2-5 JULY 1967



## OPERATION BUFFALO 6-14 JULY 1967



by the moment. The enemy was reported using captured Marine uniforms, flak jackets, and helmets to confuse friendly troops, employing flame-throwers and reportedly tear gas (later investigation could not confirm the report of tear gas). The Commanding Officer of Company B, his radio operator, two platoon commanders, and the artillery forward observer were all killed. The forward air controller took command of the company, but contact with him was lost a short time later. Only the company XO with the rear platoon managed to maintain contact with the Battalion CP, but since he was also caught in the heavy enemy fire at the rear of the extended company column, he was in no position to influence the situation to any great extent. He did regroup the remaining personnel around him and managed to move some of the casualties to an LZ established by a platoon from Company D and a platoon of tanks from Con Thien which had been sent to the rear of Company B to prepare for the arrival of Company C.

On arriving by chopper, Company C was met by a heavy artillery barrage of what was estimated to be 85mm or larger and suffered 11 WIA. Marrying up with the platoon of Company D and the platoon of tanks from Con Thien, the reinforcements worked their way into Company B's position, established a defensive perimeter, and proceeded to evacuate those wounded and dead within reach. The task of extricating the wounded proved most difficult as the evacuation LZ was, out of necessity, some distance from the scene of the fight. Furthermore, the enemy gunners were blasting away at the LZ throughout the day. The wounded were far from safe, and many of them took additional wounds while awaiting evacuation. Litter bearers and corpsmen became casualties as well.

All during the fight, both friendly and enemy supporting arms were very active. Marine aircraft in the first few hours of the battle delivered 90 tons of ordnance in 28 sorties. Artillery fired 453 missions while naval guns of the Seventh Fleet slammed 142 5-inch rounds into enemy positions. On the other hand the enemy was determined to impede any

reinforcing efforts by the Marines. Consequently, he fired 1,065 artillery and mortar rounds during the day on Gio Linh and Con Thien. More than 700 rounds fell on 1/9 elements alone.

At 1500 the 1/9 commander notified the regiment that all companies were hard pressed and with no other units available to commit, the situation was critical. The Regimental Commander, 9th Marines, dispatched 3/9 by helicopter to the battle area at 1730. Three companies and the command group were in position north of the "trace" after two and one-half hours. At this juncture, 3/9 assumed OPCON of what remained of Companies A and C, 1/9. They made a twilight attack on the enemy's left flank while the effective elements of Company B and the platoon from Company D, holding the LZ, pulled back to the Con Thien perimeter in expectation of an attack on the outpost. Under the increased pressure provided by 3/9, the enemy broke contact. Worn down and exhausted, the survivors of the morning's fight took muster. The tally of the day was a terrible revelation that caused shocked responses from Vietnam all the way back to the United States. Altogether, 1/9 lost 84 KIA, 190 WIA, and 1 MIA. In view of the heavy and widespread contacts with the enemy by ground, air, artillery, and naval gunfire units, no accurate or complete count of enemy killed could be established (estimates ran in the thousands).

During the following three days, 3-5 July, enemy contact continued. On the 3d, continuous air strikes were called in for 12 hours. The same day BLT 1/3 was off-loaded from the ARG shipping, joined the 9th Marines, and tied in to the right of 3/9 to assist in a drive north. The attack kicked off early in the morning of the 4th with 3/9 developing very solid contact at 0915 while approaching well concealed enemy positions southwest of the marketplace. A prolonged close-range clash ensued involving tanks, artillery, and liberally applied close air support interspersed with considerable amounts of enemy incoming.

When the final assault was over at 1830, there were 15 Marines killed including the commander of India Company and a platoon leader from Kilo.

There were 33 wounded among whom was the CO of Charlie Company, 1/9. The same day (4 July) marked the entry of SLF Bravo (2/3) into the operation. The battalion landed by helo north of Cam Lo and moved northward on the western periphery of the combat area toward Con Thien.

During the daylight hours on the 5th there was relatively little contact and the grim task of recovering the dead of B/1/9 was completed. During the evening of 5 July, Major Woodring (3/9) decided to slide a reinforced company out about 1,500 meters to cover an approach to his battalion perimeter. He used the composite company from 1/9, composed of the survivors of A and C companies, for this task. About 2100 an NVA company, apparently unaware of this shift in positions, came down the approach trail into the awaiting Marines. An all-night fight followed, but the Marines were well dug in and artillery and air strikes created virtual havoc amongst the stubborn NVA. By dawn, the NVA had had enough, withdrew, and left 154 dead behind. The Marines had only 12 casualties. The first phase of Operation BUFFALO was over.

#### RESULTS

From all indications it appeared that an NVA force was moving into the area for a possible attack on Con Thien. The fierce engagement of 2-4 July disrupted the intended attack and severely reduced the capability of the enemy force to initiate offensive operations in the immediate future. While there was indisputable evidence that in the early stages of the operation some enemy personnel were dressed in Marine jungle utilities and boots, flak jackets, and helmets in order to confuse friendly forces, it did not develop into a widespread tactic. The two reports of the enemy's use of tear gas were not substantiated.

The action itself could best be termed a meeting engagement. The companies of 1/9, which were probing for evidence of the suspected enemy force buildup, ran into a sizeable portion of the enemy forces ready to fight from prepared positions and in strength greater than anticipated.

For the first time in Marine experience the enemy units were supported by heavy artillery barrages, many of which were on apparently preregistered targets in the Gia Binh area. On a number of occasions the enemy opened fire with "fire for effect." The enemy made coordinated attacks, well supported by mortars and artillery. To add to the ferocity of the bombardment, NVA sappers ran immediately behind the barrage, flinging fuzed blocks of TNT into fighting holes.

In response the whole gamut of friendly supporting arms was called into play. Flare ships, fixed-wing attack aircraft directed by TPQ-10 radar, Huey gunships, naval gunfire, and all calibers of available U.S. artillery (nine batteries ranging from 105 to 175mm) were brought to bear on the NVA attacking forces. The result was a grisly carnage on the battlefield. There were literally hundreds of bodies strewn about the cratered battleground, some half-buried by exploding artillery shells and bombs, others in pieces amongst disarrayed items of individual equipment, weapons, and ammunition. The counting of enemy canteens was one of the methods that was finally resorted to in order to develop a realistic tally of casualties.

For the entire operation, the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines lost 113 KIA, 290 WIA, and 1 MIA. Of these, 84 KIA, 166 WIA, and 1 MIA occurred on the opening day. The battalion inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy -- 224 KIA (confirmed), 141 KIA (probable), and 1 POW. In addition, a large quantity of enemy materials, weapons, grenades, and C-4 explosive were destroyed in place due to a lack of means to evacuate them.

The battalion itself suffered heavy losses of equipment as well. Damaged or destroyed were 2 M274's, 3 water trailers, 1 MPC-109, 1 M-170, 1 M-416, 5 PRC 25's, 3 RC-292, 1 M-60 machine gun, and 2 60mm mortars. There was also great difficulty in reclaiming individual gear and M-16 magazines, particularly from casualties who were evacuated.

**APPENDIX B**

**Questionnaire for Overall Evaluation  
of Combat Effectiveness**

## OVERALL EVALUATION OF COMBAT EFFECTIVENESS

This section asks you to rate the "mission accomplishment," "combat effectiveness," or "performance" of the friendly battalion in the engagement which you have read. Several different ways of phrasing the issue and several different types of measurement are used. Statistical procedures will be used to check your answers for consistency so that inferences can be made about the "certainty" of your judgment. There is no reason for you to make an effort to check your own response consistency. Merely respond to each question with the best answer you can give.

PLEASE READ THE ENTIRE LIST OF QUESTIONS IN THIS SECTION BEFORE YOU BEGIN TO ANSWER.

1. Compare the overall combat effectiveness of the friendly battalion with that of units you have seen in combat. Using a 10-point scale with 10 for the worst performance and 1 for the most effective performance you have personally seen, rank this unit.

\_\_\_\_ Ranking

2. Perhaps the most important way of organizing your thoughts about the "combat effectiveness" of a military unit is to relate the outcome achieved to the military mission of the unit. Military missions are, of course, relatively complex, including components such as delaying an enemy advance, seizing specific territory, breaking through a line of resistance, destroying enemy units, and so forth. Based on your understanding of the friendly battalion's mission and the material you have read about the engagement, please rate the unit as indicated below.

Compared with 10 typical combat engagements, rank the unit on mission accomplishment. A score of 1 indicates the most complete mission accomplishment compared with those you have seen, 10 the least mission accomplishment. \_\_\_\_\_ Ranking

3. The relative performance of military units is very difficult to compare in part because different units face different levels of resistance from enemy forces and different levels of difficulty with terrain. Even the most combat effective units will have difficulty in achieving their missions in the face of heavy, determined opposition. Thinking this time, not about mission accomplishment in the abstract, but rather in light of the resistance actually encountered and the terrain involved, please rate the mission accomplishment of the friendly battalion.

Compared with 10 typical combat engagements, rank the unit on mission accomplishment in light of enemy resistance. The best possible rank is 1; the worst is 10. \_\_\_\_\_ Ranking

4. Another reason that it might be difficult to evaluate a unit's performance is that the battalion has no control over the orders or decision-making of its regiment or division commanders. There can be considerable variation in the difficulty of the assigned missions, the coordination of the various other units, the numbers of casualties to be absorbed before withdrawing, and so forth. Taking into consideration the overall characteristics of the regiment and division commands in this engagement, please rate the battalion's mission accomplishment.

Compared with 10 typical combat engagements, rank the unit on mission accomplishment in light of the characteristics of the regimental and division commands. The best possible rank is 1; 10 is the worst. \_\_\_\_\_ Ranking

5. Yet a third extenuating circumstance influencing the evaluation of a unit is the adequacy by which other supporting units such as artillery, air, or naval gunfire perform their functions. Superb

support can make a marginal unit look good whereas inadequate support can bring failure to the best unit. In light of the adequacy of the support from units outside the control of the battalion how would you rate the battalion's mission accomplishment?

Compared with 10 typical combat engagements, rank the unit on mission accomplishment considering the adequacy of support from units outside the control of the battalion. The best possible rank is 1; 10 is the worst. \_\_\_\_\_ Ranking

6. Now that you have considered these three types of extenuating circumstances individually, we would like you to think about the overall performance in light of all of those factors which might have made the mission particularly easy or difficult. Considering all of them together, please rate the battalion's mission accomplishment?

Compared with 10 typical combat engagements, rank the unit on mission accomplishment considering all of these extenuating circumstances which were outside the control of the battalion. The best possible rank is 1; 10 is the worst. \_\_\_\_\_ Ranking

**APPENDIX C**  
**Form for Judgmental Evaluation  
of Critical Factors**

### JUDGMENTAL EVALUATION OF CRITICAL FACTORS

This portion of the coding calls for you to indicate which factors were crucial in determining the outcome of the engagement which you have read. There are over 40 different factors listed on the coding form. They have been selected because the literature on military science suggests that they may be important in determining the results of any engagement.

Figure 1 shows a hypothetical page from the coding form. Note that the factors have been clustered into several subject areas such as background of the engagement, overall planning for the engagement, and so forth. Each subject area consists of several major factors. The primary coding task deals with these factors. They are typed in upper case letters on the form and have small scales opposite them on the page. Typical factors would be naval gunfire, weather, and timeliness of orders. Where there is some ambiguity about the meaning of a factor, the components of interest for these analyses are listed below the main factor in initial caps. For example, the factor "RESERVES," under the subject of planning, is made up of the components "adequacy (numbers)" and "locations." Generally, only major factors are coded, and only they have scales opposite them on the page. The only exceptions are for the principles of war (both in planning and execution). Individual components are coded for the principles. Hence, coding scales are located opposite each component in these sections.

You are asked, in evaluating each factor, to decide first whether you have enough information, based on the engagement description, to judge the performance of the unit and/or the importance of the factor for this engagement. If you do not have enough information, you should check the "No Information" box and go on to the next factor. The coder for our example sheet felt that there was not enough information to render a judgment about Factor A.

I. SUBJECT AREA		<u>No Information</u>	<u>Unsatisfactory</u>	<u>Satisfactory</u>	<u>High</u>
				<u>Importance to the Outcome of This Engagement</u>	<u>Rating</u>
I.1.	FACTOR A				
a)	Component 1				
b)	Component 2				
I.2.	FACTOR B				
I.3.	FACTOR C				
a)	Component 1				
b)	Component 2				
c)	Component 3				
d)	Component 4				
e)	Component 5				

Figure 1. Example Coding Sheet for Critical Factors

If you do have information, you should first indicate how important this factor was in determining the outcome of the engagement. Do this by placing a check mark at the appropriate place on the "importance" scale. Our example coder felt that Factor B was very important, while Factor C was of only minor significance. Next, code the performance of the unit on the factor. Note that a "barrier" (solid line) has been placed at the center of the performance scale to force a decision as to whether the unit, based on the engagement description, is judged to have performed satisfactorily or unsatisfactorily. The performance scale runs from low to high. Our example coder indicated that the unit performed marginally and unsatisfactorily on Factor B and very well on Factor C.

Each coding on this form is independent (there are no statistical cross checks for consistency). Your best strategy is probably to work straight through the questionnaire, leaving blank the factors on which you are initially uncertain. After finishing the form, return and code the more difficult items after you have had a few moments to think about them.

	Importance to the Out- come of This Engagement	Rating		
		No Information	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory

#### I. BACKGROUND TO ENGAGEMENT

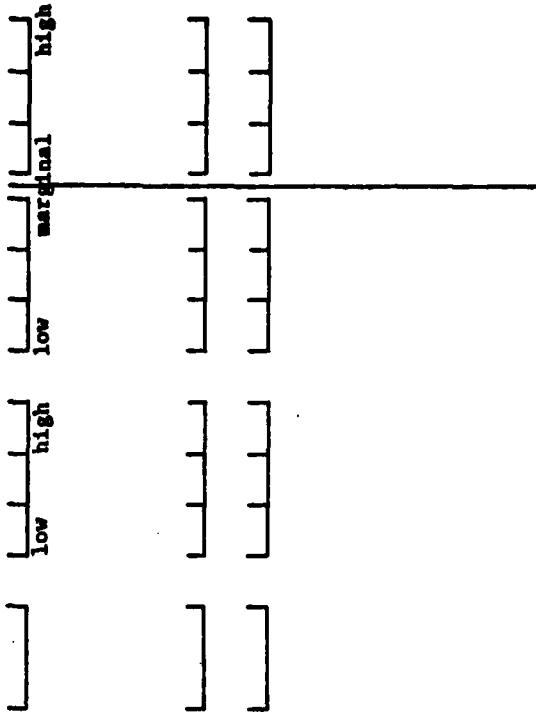
##### I.1 TRAINING, OVERALL

- a. For This Action
- b. Rehearsals

##### I.2 MORALE AT OUTSET

#### I.3 GENERAL QUALITY OF INFORMATION

- a. Maps
- b. Aerial Reconnaissance and Photos
- c. Terrain
- d. Quality and Type of Enemy Forces
- e. Ground Reconnaissance



	<u>Importance</u> to the Out- come of This Engagement	<u>No</u> <u>Information</u>	<u>Unsatisfactory</u>	<u>Satisfactory</u>
<b>II. OVERALL PLANNING FOR THE ENGAGEMENT</b>				
<b>II.1 QUALITY OF PLAN</b>				
a. Objectives	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
b. Missions of Subordinate Units	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
c. Information on Overall Operation and Its Goals	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
d. Timing of Actions	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
e. Zones of Responsibility	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
f. Support Available	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
1. Air	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
2. Artillery	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
3. Naval Gunfire	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
<b>II.2 CONSISTENCY OF PLAN WITH PRINCIPLES OF WAR</b>				
a. Objective	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
b. Offensive	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
c. Mass	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
d. Economy of Force	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
e. Maneuver	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

## II. Overall Planning (cont'd)

	<u>No Information Engagement</u>	<u>Importance to the Outcome of This</u>	<u>Rating</u>
	<u>Unsatisfactory</u>	<u>Satisfactory</u>	
f. Unity of Command	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
g. Security	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
h. Surprise	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
i. Simplicity	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
II.3 TIMELINESS OF ORDERS	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
a. Original Warning Orders	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
b. Commander's Concept of the Operation	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
c. Operations Planning	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
II.4 RESERVES	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
a. Adequacy (numbers)	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
b. Locations	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
II.5 LOGISTICS SUPPORT	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
a. Supply Situation and Procedures For Resupply	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
b. Medical Facilities	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
c. Communications and Coordination Signals	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

**II. Overall Planning (cont'd)**

	<u>No Information</u>	<u>Importance to the Outcome to This Engagement</u>	<u>Rating</u>		
			<u>Unsatisfactory</u>	<u>Marginal</u>	<u>Satisfactory</u>
<b>II.6 SUBORDINATE UNITS (BnCO to Subordinates)</b>			low	high	high
a. Situation Communicated; Including Objectives and Fit With Other Operations			low	high	high
b. Knowledge of Subordinate Unit Situation, Strength, Location, Personnel			low	high	high
c. Plans Developed, Communicated, Reviewed in a Timely Fashion			low	high	high
d. Coordination of Subordinate Units			low	high	high
<b>II.7 AWARENESS OF ENEMY CAPABILITIES</b>			low	high	high
a. Infantry			low	high	high
b. Armor			low	high	high
c. Anti-Mechanized			low	high	high
d. Artillery			low	high	high
e. Air			low	high	high
f. Anti-Air			low	high	high
g. Chemical			low	high	high
h. Nuclear			low	high	high
i. Special Capabilities (Night Surveillance and so forth)			low	high	high

	<u>Importance to the Out- come of This Engagement</u>	<u>No Information</u>	<u>Effect on U.S. Troops</u>
<b>III.1 WEATHER AND ENEMY SITUATION</b>			
III.1.1 WEATHER	[ ]	[ ] low [ ] high [ ] deleterious [ ] beneficial	
III.1.2 QUALITY (TYPE AND EXPERIENCE) OF ENEMY FORCES	[ ]	[ ]	
		<u>Rating</u>	
		<u>Importance to the Out- come of This Engagement</u>	<u>Unsatisfactory</u> <u>Satisfactory</u>
<b>III.2 OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF EXECUTION</b>			
III.2.1 IMPLEMENTATION OF PRINCIPLES OF WAR IN ACTION	[ ]	[ ] low [ ] high [ ] marginal [ ] high	
a. Objective	[ ]	[ ]	
b. Offensive	[ ]	[ ]	
c. Mass	[ ]	[ ]	
d. Economy of Force	[ ]	[ ]	
e. Maneuver	[ ]	[ ]	
f. Unity of Command	[ ]	[ ]	
g. Security	[ ]	[ ]	
h. Surprise	[ ]	[ ]	
i. Simplicity	[ ]	[ ]	

	<u>Importance to the Out- come of This Engagement</u>	<u>No Information</u>	<u>Unsatisfactory</u>	<u>Satisfactory</u>	<u>Rating</u>
a.	low	high	low	high	1
b.	low	high	low	high	1
c.	low	high	low	high	1
d.	low	high	low	high	1
e.	low	high	low	high	1
f.	low	high	low	high	1
g.	low	high	low	high	1
h.	low	high	low	high	1
i.	low	high	low	high	1
j.	low	high	low	high	1
k.	low	high	low	high	1
l.	low	high	low	high	1
m.	low	high	low	high	1

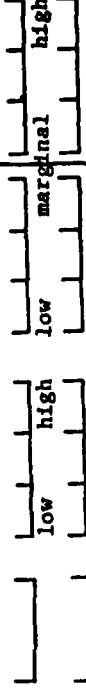
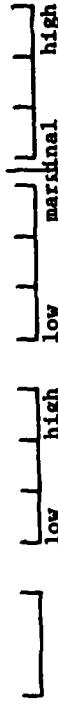
### III.2.2 MANEUVER

		<u>Importance to the Out- come of This Engagement</u>	<u>No Information</u>	<u>Rating</u>	<u>Satisfactory</u>
<b>III.2.3 USE OF FIRE</b>					
a.	<b>Organic</b>				
	1. Fire discipline				
	2. Location of organic crew-served weapons				
b.	Timeliness of Organic Fire				
c.	Accuracy of Organic Fire				
d.	Fire Planning For Organic Weapons				
<b>III.2.4 SUPPORT ARTILLERY</b>					
a.	Location of Trained Observers				
b.	Communication With Supporting Units				
c.	Fire Planning				
d.	Use of Fire to Attain Unit Objectives				
e.	Ammunition Availability				
f.	Use of Appropriate Ammunition Type				

<u>No Information</u>	<u>Importance to the Outcome of This Engagement</u>	<u>Rating</u>	
		<u>Unsatisfactory</u>	<u>Satisfactory</u>
		low	high

### III.2.5 NAVAL GUNFIRE

- a. Location of Trained Observers
- b. Communication With Supporting Units
- c. Fire Planning
- d. Use of Fire to Attain Unit Objectives
- e. Ammunition Availability
- f. Use of Appropriate Ammunition Types



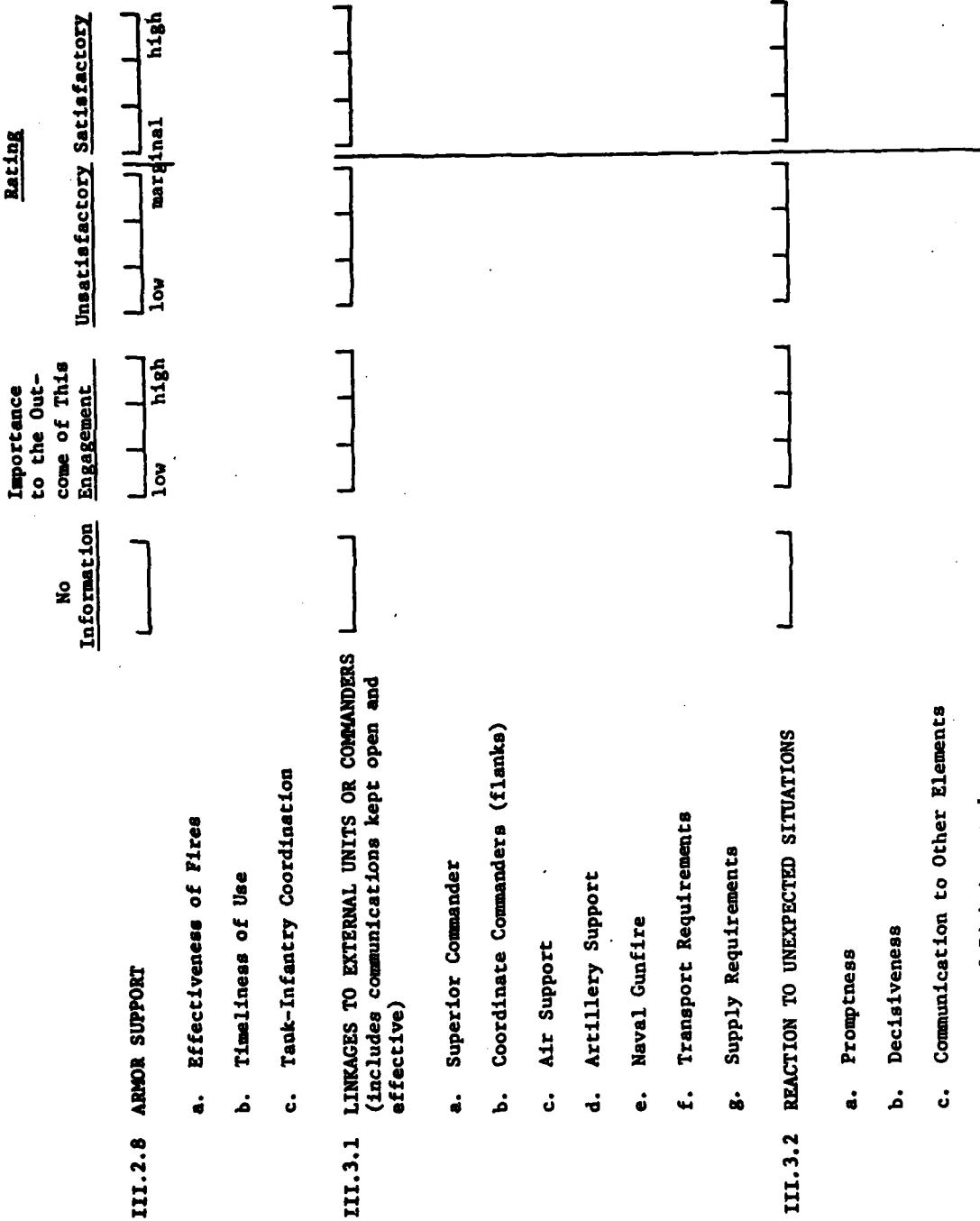
### III.2.6 TACTICAL AIR SUPPORT

#### III.2.6.1 PREPARATORY INTERDICTION

#### III.2.6.2 CLOSE AIR SUPPORT

- a. Location of Coordinators
- b. Communications With Air Support
- c. Planning For Use
- d. Timelines of Requests
- e. Use of Air Support to Attain Unit Objectives
- f. Use of Proper Types of Ordnance

		Rating		
		No Information	Importance to the Outcome of This Engagement	Unsatisfactory Satisfactory
		[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
III.2.7	OVERNIGHT POSITIONS			
	III.2.7.1 ADEQUACY OF POSITION			
a.	Location	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
b.	Reconnaissance	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
c.	Linkages Between Units	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
d.	Supply Routes Open, Protected	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
e.	Consideration of Enemy Capabilities	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
	III.2.7.2 ADEQUACY OF PROTECTION			
a.	Barriers Employed	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
b.	Location of CP	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
c.	Likely Avenues of Attack Blocked	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
d.	Use of Concealment and Camouflage	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
	III.2.7.3 SECURITY ON THE MOVE			
a.	Use of Proper Formations	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
b.	Development of Enemy Positions Without Endangering Column	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]



	<u>No Information</u>	<u>Importance to the Outcome of This Engagement</u>	<u>Rating</u>		
			<u>Unsatisfactory</u>	<u>Satisfactory</u>	<u>High</u>
III.4 MISCELLANEOUS FACTORS					
III.4.1 MORALE DURING COMBAT	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
III.4.2 DISCIPLINE	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
III.4.3 AGGRESSIONNESS	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
III.4.4 INITIATIVE	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
III.4.5 RESOURCEFULNESS UNDER PRESSURE	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
III.4.6 CASUALTY LEVELS (Impact on Effectiveness)	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
III.4.7 MEDICAL AND EVACUATION SUPPORT	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

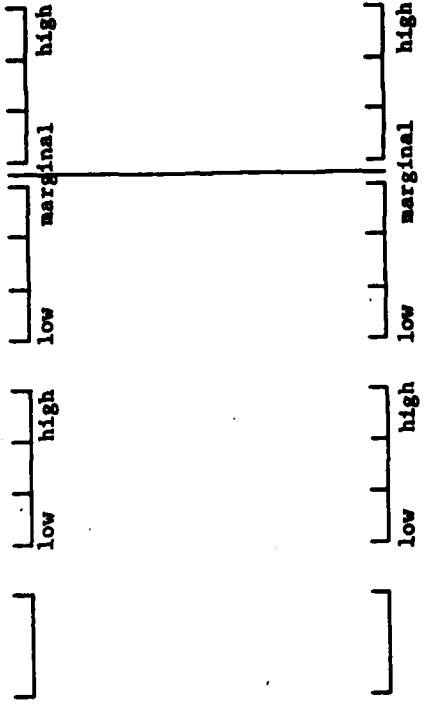
	<u>No Information</u>	<u>Engagement</u>	<u>Importance to the Outcome of This Engagement</u>	<u>Rating</u>
	<u>Satisfactory</u>	<u>Unsatisfactory</u>	<u>Marginal</u>	<u>High</u>
<b>III.5 SUPPLY</b>				
<b>III.5.1 AMMUNITION ADEQUACY, TIMELINESS OF RESUPPLY, AVAILABILITY OF KEY TYPES</b>				
a. Small Arms				
b. Organic Weapons				
c. Demolition				
d. Support Artillery				
e. Naval Gunfire				
f. Air Support Ordnance				
<b>III.5.2 POL</b>				
a. Availability				
b. Prompt Response to Resupply Request				
<b>III.5.3 FOOD AND WATER</b>				

	<u>Importance</u>	<u>Rating</u>	
<u>No Information</u>	<u>to the Outcome of This Engagement</u>	<u>Unsatisfactory</u>	<u>Satisfactory</u>
<b>III.5.4 BARRIER MATERIALS</b>			
a. Mines	[ ]	[ ] low	[ ]
b. Wire	[ ]	[ ] high	[ ]
<b>III.5.5 SPECIAL EQUIPMENT</b>			
a. Chemical			
1. Availability on request			
2. Adequacy			
b. Biological			
c. Nuclear			
d. Cold Weather			
1. Availability on request			
2. Adequacy			
e. Other - Availability on Request			

	<u>Importance</u>	<u>Rating</u>
	<u>No Information</u>	<u>High</u>
	<u>Come of This Engagement</u>	<u>Low</u>
	<u>Unsatisfactory</u>	<u>Satisfactory</u>

**III.5.6 MAINTENANCE -- EVIDENCE OF FAILURE  
IN ACTION**

- a. Individual Weapons
- b. Crew Served
  - 1. Organic
  - 2. Artillery
- c. Vehicles



**III.5.7 COMMUNICATIONS**

- a. Adequacy of Supply
- b. Effectiveness of Use

**APPENDIX D**  
**Historical or "Objective" Data Collection Forms:**  
**Working Papers for Internal Use**

ENGAGEMENT NO. \_\_\_\_\_

Operation (Name, location, year) \_\_\_\_\_

Phase \_\_\_\_\_ Dates \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

Unit (Bn, Regt, Div) \_\_\_\_\_

**PERSONNEL - KEY STAFF AND COMMANDERS**

1. <u>Position</u>	<u>Name (Last, first, MI)</u>	<u>Time With This Unit</u>
Bn Cmdr	_____	_____
Bn XO	_____	_____
Bn S-2	_____	_____
Bn S-3	_____	_____
Bn S-4	_____	_____
CO, H&S Co	_____	_____
CO, Co	_____	_____
CO, Co	_____	_____
CO, Co	_____	_____
CO, Co	_____	_____

(Above data extracted from actual records)

2. Average length of time Bn CO, staff, and Co. CO's with unit:

Unknown (#)	<1 mo (1)	1-2 mos (2)	2-6 mos (3)	>6 mos (4)
----------------	--------------	----------------	----------------	---------------

**PERSONNEL - KEY STAFF AND COMMANDERS**

**Form D-1**

ENGAGEMENT NO. \_\_\_\_\_

Operation (Name, location, year) \_\_\_\_\_

Phase \_\_\_\_\_ Dates \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

Unit (Bn, Regt, Div) \_\_\_\_\_

**PERSONNEL - STRENGTH, SHORTAGES, CASUALTIES**

1. Unit Strength at Operation or Phase Start:

	<u>USMC</u>	<u>USN</u>	<u>Total</u>
Officers	_____	_____	_____
Enlisted	_____	_____	_____
Total	_____	_____	_____

2. Casualties:

	<u>Officers</u>	<u>Enlisted</u>	<u>Total</u>
KIA	_____	_____	_____
WIA	_____	_____	_____
MIA	_____	_____	_____
Total	_____	_____	_____

3. Estimate of Casualty Levels:

<u>None 0%</u> (0)	<u>Low &lt;3%</u> (1)	<u>Moderate 4%-15%</u> (2)	<u>High 15%-30%</u> (3)	<u>Very High &gt;30%</u> (4)
-----------------------	--------------------------	-------------------------------	----------------------------	---------------------------------

**ENGAGEMENT NO.** \_\_\_\_\_

**Operation (Name, location, year)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phase** \_\_\_\_\_ **Dates** \_\_\_\_\_ **to** \_\_\_\_\_

**Unit (Bn, Regt, Div)** \_\_\_\_\_

**UNIT EXPERIENCE**

**1. No. of months in the theater** \_\_\_\_\_

**2. No. of months in combat since arrival** \_\_\_\_\_

**3. No. of previous operations since arrival** \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Type of this engagement (select number from list below)** \_\_\_\_\_

<b>1. Amphibious assault</b>	<b>6. Urban combat</b>
<b>2. Helicopter assault</b>	<b>7. Retrograde</b>
<b>3. Ground attack (day)</b>	<b>8. Prepared defense</b>
<b>4. Ground attack (night)</b>	<b>9. Hasty defense</b>
<b>5. Search and destroy</b>	

**5. Number of previous engagements of above type** \_\_\_\_\_

**UNIT EXPERIENCE**

**Form D-3**

ENGAGEMENT NO. \_\_\_\_\_

Operation (Name, location, year) \_\_\_\_\_

Phase \_\_\_\_\_ Dates \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

Unit (Bn, Regt, Div) \_\_\_\_\_

UNIT EXPERIENCE - TRAINING

1. Unit Completed Training:

Full Cycle \_\_\_\_\_ (1)

Limited or

Accelerated \_\_\_\_\_ (2)

Unknown \_\_\_\_\_ (9)

2. Levels of Training:

	None (0)	Slight-Mod. Amount (1)	Extensive (2)	Unknown (9)
a. Bn	_____	_____	_____	_____
b. Regt.	_____	_____	_____	_____
c. Div.	_____	_____	_____	_____
d. Maneuvers	_____	_____	_____	_____

3. Had a rehearsal of operation been carried out?

yes  
(1)      No  
(2)

UNIT EXPERIENCE - TRAINING

Form D-4

ENGAGEMENT NO. \_\_\_\_\_

Operation (Name, location, year) \_\_\_\_\_

Phase \_\_\_\_\_ Dates \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

Unit (Bn, Regt, Div) \_\_\_\_\_

FRIENDLY - ENEMY FACTORS

1. Type(s) of Troops Engaged: (indicate breakdown among the following types)

<u>Friendly</u>	<u>Enemy</u>
Seasoned combat veterans (1)	_____
Trained regular troops (2)	_____
Average, mixed experience unit (3)	_____
Irregulars, guerrillas, etc. (4)	_____
Hastily organized unit ( <u>ad hoc</u> ) (5)	_____
Other (describe) (6) _____	_____

2. Comparison of Forces

2a. Extent of Enemy Opposition:

None (0)	Light (1)	Mod (2)	Heavy (3)
-------------	--------------	------------	--------------

2b. Force Ratio (Enemy/Friendly): \_\_\_\_\_

3. Availability of Support Components: (check appropriate lines)

Neither Side (0)	E - yes (1)	Both yes (2)	F - yes E - no (3)	Unknown (9)
Artillery Support	—	—	—	—
Mortar Support	—	—	—	—

FRIENDLY - ENEMY FACTORS

Form D-5, Page 1 of 3

	<u>Neither Side (0)</u>	<u>E - yes (1)</u>	<u>Both yes (2)</u>	<u>F - yes E - no (3)</u>	<u>Unknown (9)</u>
Armor Support	—	—	—	—	—
Air Support (overall)	—	—	—	—	—
Fixed Wing	—	—	—	—	—
Helicopter	—	—	—	—	—
Naval Gunfire	—	—	—	—	—
Surface Missile Support	—	—	—	—	—
Anti-Air (overall)	—	—	—	—	—
Ground Fire	—	—	—	—	—
Homing (missile)	—	—	—	—	—
Missile ground control	—	—	—	—	—
Chemical weapons	—	—	—	—	—

4. Enemy Positions: Hasty \_\_\_\_\_ Prepared \_\_\_\_\_ Concrete \_\_\_\_\_  
(1) (2) (3)

5. Enemy Command & Control: Poor \_\_\_\_\_ Fair \_\_\_\_\_ Good \_\_\_\_\_  
(1) \_\_\_\_\_ (2) \_\_\_\_\_ (3) \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Type of Surprise by the Enemy: (check one or more as appropriate)**

**None** \_\_\_\_\_ **Tactics** \_\_\_\_\_ **Strength** \_\_\_\_\_ **Locations** \_\_\_\_\_ **Weapons** \_\_\_\_\_  
**(0)** \_\_\_\_\_ **(1)** \_\_\_\_\_ **(2)** \_\_\_\_\_ **(3)** \_\_\_\_\_ **(4)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Other (5) (specify)**

7. Type of Surprise by Friendly Troops: (check one or more as appropriate)

**None** — **Tactics** — **Strength** — **Locations** — **Weapons** —  
**(0)**      **(1)**      **(2)**      **(3)**      **(4)**

**Other (5) (specify)**

## **FRIENDLY - ENEMY FACTORS**

Form D-5, Page 2 of 3

8. Degree to Which U.S. Was Suprised by the Enemy:

None (0)	Slight/Mod. (1)	Great (2)
-------------	--------------------	--------------

9. Primary and Secondary Types of Combat (from list below, select appropriate numbers to fill in following blanks)

OFFENSE

1. Movement to Contact
2. Attack
3. Night Attack
4. Amphibious Assault
5. Helicopter Assault
6. Tank-Infantry
7. Mechanized Operation
8. Evacuation
9. Combat Patrolling

DEFENSE

10. Defensive Operation
11. Retrograde
12. Break Contact
13. Enemy Air Action
14. Enemy Chemical Attack
15. Enemy BW Attack
16. Electronic Countermeasures
17. Enemy Nuclear Threat

a. Primary Type of Combat for Friendly Forces: \_\_\_\_\_

b. Primary Type of Combat for Enemy Forces: \_\_\_\_\_

c. Secondary Types of Combat for Friendly Forces: \_\_\_\_\_

d. Secondary Types of Combat for Enemy Forces: \_\_\_\_\_

**ENGAGEMENT NO.** \_\_\_\_\_

**Operation (Name, location, year)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phase** \_\_\_\_\_ **Dates** \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

**Unit (Bn, Regt, Div)** \_\_\_\_\_

**PLANNING VARIABLES**

1. Indicate the level of command which was primarily responsible for production of plans governing combat activity of the Bn.

<b>Not Applicable (0)</b>	<b>Bn (1)</b>	<b>Regt (2)</b>	<b>Div (3)</b>	<b>Other (4) (specify)</b>
-----------------------------------	---------------	-----------------	----------------	--------------------------------

2. In light of scale of operation, indicate level of engagement planning carried out by the above agency:

<b>Unknown (0)</b>	<b>Improvised (1)</b>	<b>Hasty (2)</b>	<b>Deliberate (3)</b>
--------------------	-----------------------	------------------	-----------------------

**PLANNING VARIABLES**

**Form D-6**

ENGAGEMENT NO. \_\_\_\_\_

Operation (Name, location, year) \_\_\_\_\_

Phase \_\_\_\_\_ Dates \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

Unit (Bn, Regt, Div) \_\_\_\_\_

**PRE-ENGAGEMENT: PREPARATORY FIRES**

1. Rate overall fire effectiveness of types of pre-engagement fires from following scale:

0 = Not Applicable  
1 = Poor or Fair  
2 = Good  
3 = Excellent  
9 = Unknown

	<u>Softening Up</u>	<u>Immediately Pre-Attack</u>
a. Air		
1. Bombers	_____	_____
2. Fighters	_____	_____
3. Helicopters	_____	_____
b. Artillery	_____	_____
c. Mortars	_____	_____
d. Naval Gunfire	_____	_____
e. Other (specify)	_____	_____
f. Overall (all fires)	_____	_____

2. Approximate duration of total preparatory fire period:

<u>None</u> (0)	<u>&lt;1 hour</u> (1)	<u>1-6 hrs.</u> (2)	<u>6-24 hrs.</u> (3)	<u>&gt;24 hrs.</u> (4)	<u>Unknown</u> (9)
--------------------	--------------------------	------------------------	-------------------------	---------------------------	-----------------------

**PRE-ENGAGEMENT: PREPARATORY FIRES**

Form D-7

ENGAGEMENT NO. \_\_\_\_\_

Operation (Name, location, year) \_\_\_\_\_

Phase \_\_\_\_\_ Dates \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

Unit (Bn, Regt, Div) \_\_\_\_\_

OPERATIONS SUPPORT/EFFECTIVENESS OF FIRES

1. Rate overall friendly and enemy fire intensity during engagement for weapons indicated:

0 = Not Applicable  
1 = Poor or Fair Effectiveness  
2 = Good Effectiveness  
3 = Excellent Effectiveness  
9 = Insufficient Data (Unknown)

	<u>Friendly</u>	<u>Enemy</u>
a. Organic crew-served weapons	____	____
b. Artillery fire	____	____
c. Close air support	____	____
d. Tank fires	____	____
e. Naval gunfire	____	____
f. Other significant fire (specify) _____	____	____
g. Overall - all fires (provide any comments or notations from battalion reports. Indicate if no comment made. Cover friendly and enemy.)	____	____

2. Rate (using scale in #1 above) overall friendly and enemy fire effectiveness during engagement for weapons indicated:

a. Organic crew-served weapons	____	____
b. Artillery fire	____	____
c. Close air support	____	____
d. Tank fires	____	____
e. Naval gunfire	____	____

	<u>Friendly</u>	<u>Enemy</u>
--	-----------------	--------------

f. Other significant fire (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

g. Overall - all fires \_\_\_\_\_

(Provide any comments or notations from battalion reports. Indicate if no comment made. Cover friendly and enemy.)

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3. Artillery:

No. of Batteries - direct support \_\_\_\_\_

No. of Batteries - indirect support \_\_\_\_\_

No. of Batteries - total support \_\_\_\_\_

ENGAGEMENT NO. \_\_\_\_\_

Operation (Name, location, year) \_\_\_\_\_

Phase \_\_\_\_\_ Dates \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

Unit (Bn, Regt, Div) \_\_\_\_\_

EQUIPMENT, SUPPLIES, AMMUNITION, AND EVACUATION VARIABLES

1. Equipment Availability:

Type	Not Used (no need) (0)	Not Avail. (should have been) (1)	Reduced (2)	Avail. Essentially as Authorized (3)	Unknown (9)
Landing Craft	—	—	—	—	—
Shore Party Equipment	—	—	—	—	—
Assault Vehicles	—	—	—	—	—
Ground Transport	—	—	—	—	—
Weapons	—	—	—	—	—
Clothing and Equipment	—	—	—	—	—
Communications Equipment	—	—	—	—	—
Other	—	—	—	—	—

EQUIPMENT, SUPPLIES, AMMUNITION, AND EVACUATION VARIABLES Form D-9, Page 1 of 3

2. Ammunition Availability:

	<u>Not Used (no need) (0)</u>	<u>Not Avail. (should have been) (1)</u>	<u>Marginal (2)</u>	<u>Sufficient or Ample (3)</u>	<u>Unknown (9)</u>
Small arms (rifle, pistol, grenades)	—	—	—	—	—
Machine gun	—	—	—	—	—
Artillery	—	—	—	—	—
Mortar	—	—	—	—	—
Rocket	—	—	—	—	—

3. Ammunition Problems: Were availability, capability, and appropriateness considered to be

<u>Insignificant (1)</u>	<u>Somewhat Important (2)</u>	<u>Critical (3)</u>	<u>No info. Unknown (9)</u>
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3a. Ammunition Problems: (Adequacy, capability, appropriateness) (Indicate comments or notations from battalion records.)

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4. Supply Availability:

	<u>Marginal (0)</u>	<u>Interrupted (1)</u>	<u>Sufficient (2)</u>	<u>Ample (3)</u>	<u>Unknown (9)</u>
Rations - type	—	—	—	—	—
Medical supplies	—	—	—	—	—
POL	—	—	—	—	—
Spare parts	—	—	—	—	—
Other	—	—	—	—	—

5. Supply Delivery: Daily \_\_\_\_\_ Periodic \_\_\_\_\_ Erratic \_\_\_\_\_

6. Delivery Problems: Lack of transport \_\_\_\_\_ Inadequate air delivery \_\_\_\_\_  
Weather interruptions \_\_\_\_\_ Enemy road interdiction \_\_\_\_\_ Bridge out \_\_\_\_\_  
Delivery equipment problems \_\_\_\_\_ Lack of supply personnel \_\_\_\_\_  
Other (describe type and extent) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. Medical Evacuation: By vehicle \_\_\_\_\_ By helicopter \_\_\_\_\_ On foot \_\_\_\_\_  
None \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

8. Speed of Evacuation: Prompt - in minutes \_\_\_\_\_ Within 1 hour \_\_\_\_\_  
Delayed - hours \_\_\_\_\_ Days \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Comments

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

ENGAGEMENT NO. \_\_\_\_\_

Operation (Name, location, year) \_\_\_\_\_

Phase \_\_\_\_\_ Dates \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

Unit (Bn, Regt, Div) \_\_\_\_\_

COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION VARIABLES

1. Rate the overall quality of communications for the following:

Internal Communication

	NA (0)	Poor* (1)	Fair (2)	Good (3)	Unknown (9)
a. Co.CO's ↔ Platoons	—	—	—	—	—
b. Bn.CO ↔ Co.CO's	—	—	—	—	—
c. Bn ↔ Support Fires (air, arty, etc.)	—	—	—	—	—
d. Bn ↔ Adj. Bns.	—	—	—	—	—
e. Bn ↔ Regt.	—	—	—	—	—

\* Severely interrupted or nonexistent

ENGAGEMENT NO. \_\_\_\_\_

Operation (Name, location, year) \_\_\_\_\_

Phase \_\_\_\_\_ Dates \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

Unit (Bn, Regt, Div) \_\_\_\_\_

SITUATION CONTROLS (SUMMARY)

	None (0)	Low (1)	Mod. (2)	High (3)	Unknown (9)
--	-------------	------------	-------------	-------------	----------------

1. Severity of Opposition:

- a. Enemy Infantry Resistance \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Enemy Arty. Resistance \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Enemy Armor Resistance \_\_\_\_\_
- d. Enemy Air Attack Resistance \_\_\_\_\_
- e. Other \_\_\_\_\_

2. Predominant Type(s) of Terrain Encountered:

- 1. Open \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. Tank country \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. Jungle \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. Urban \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. Sandy Beach \_\_\_\_\_
- 6. Rocky shore \_\_\_\_\_
- 7. Swampy ground \_\_\_\_\_
- 8. Hilly \_\_\_\_\_
- 9. Mountainous \_\_\_\_\_
- 10. Desert \_\_\_\_\_
- 11. Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

3. Time of Engagement: (active fighting)

N/A (0)

Day (1)

Both (2)

Night (3)

4. Weather: (check as appropriate - indicate % if available)

- a. Clear \_\_\_\_\_
- Rain \_\_\_\_\_
- Snow \_\_\_\_\_
- Muddy \_\_\_\_\_

SITUATION CONTROLS

Form D-11, Page 1 of 2

b. Temperature - Was it a factor? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

What was effect? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Additional Comments

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ENGAGEMENT NO. \_\_\_\_\_

Operation (Name, location, year) \_\_\_\_\_

Phase \_\_\_\_\_ Dates \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

Unit (Bn, Regt, Div) \_\_\_\_\_

OUTCOME MEASURES

1. Was the objective achieved? Yes (1) \_\_\_\_\_ No (2) \_\_\_\_\_

(If a sequence of objectives, indicate for each) yes (1) \_\_\_\_\_ No (2) \_\_\_\_\_

2. When was it achieved?

Early or on Time (1)	Late (2)	Not at All (3)
----------------------------	-------------	----------------------

3. Enemy Casualties (indicate if estimated)

No. POW's taken \_\_\_\_\_

No. Enemy KIA \_\_\_\_\_

No. Enemy WIA \_\_\_\_\_

Total Enemy Casualties & POW's \_\_\_\_\_

4. Residual Capabilities (friendly)

Final Percent of Auth. Strength \_\_\_\_\_

Final Percent of Pre-Eng. Strength \_\_\_\_\_

5. Overall Residual Supply Situation

Poor (greatly depleted) (1)	Fair (somewhat depleted) (2)	Good/Very Good (3)	Unknown (9)
--------------------------------------	---------------------------------------	-----------------------	----------------

6. Were there any incidents indicating that political constraints of any kind impaired the efficiency of the unit in accomplishing its mission?

yes (1)	no (2)
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Comments: (extract from unit records, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

OUTCOME MEASURES

Form D-12

**APPENDIX E**

**Biographical Data Code Sheet  
Working Paper for Internal Use**

## OFFICER PARTICIPANT

CODE \_\_\_\_\_

1. Name \_\_\_\_\_
2. Rank \_\_\_\_\_
3. Check Current Status: Army \_\_\_\_\_ Navy \_\_\_\_\_ USMC \_\_\_\_\_  
Active \_\_\_\_\_ Retired \_\_\_\_\_ Reserve on Active Duty \_\_\_\_\_
4. Length of Active Service \_\_\_\_\_ Years
5. Command of a Combat Unit Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_  
List below unit, country, approximate dates  
a \_\_\_\_\_  
b \_\_\_\_\_  
c \_\_\_\_\_
6. Other Combat Duty Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_  
List below unit, country, approximate dates, position  
a \_\_\_\_\_  
b \_\_\_\_\_  
c \_\_\_\_\_
7. Total Time in Combat Theater(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Months  
a. World War II \_\_\_\_\_ b. Korea \_\_\_\_\_ c. Vietnam \_\_\_\_\_
8. Command Experience (other than combat) Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_  
List below level, unit, approximate dates  
a \_\_\_\_\_  
b \_\_\_\_\_  
c \_\_\_\_\_  
d \_\_\_\_\_  
e \_\_\_\_\_
9. Highest Military Service School Previously Attended \_\_\_\_\_
10. Highest Level Civilian Education \_\_\_\_\_
11. Number of Years Assigned to Division Headquarters or Higher Level  
\_\_\_\_\_

## UNCLASSIFIED

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE (When Data Entered)

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20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) The concept of combat effectiveness was defined as the ability of a military unit to accomplish its assigned mission in a hostile environment. Data were collected on 41 U.S. Marine Corps infantry battalion actions ranging from World War II through the Vietnam War. Over 200 historical (factual) variables were collected, including information about unit composition, training, engagement planning, preparatory fires, actions of the battalion during the engagement, supporting fires, combat support (logistics, communications, and medical) and		

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the combat environment (enemy forces, terrain, weather, political conditions, and restrictions). The historical data were supplemented by judgmental information provided by 82 officer coders who indicated how well or badly the unit performed with regard to 60 specific factors affecting the unit. Their codings were based on reading narrative descriptions of the engagements that had been prepared by the research team. The officer coders ranged in rank from lieutenant to lieutenant-general (retired), in combat experience from World War II to Vietnam, in education from high school through master's degree, and included U.S. Army and Marine Corps officers who were attending or had graduated from most of the senior schools in the military system. The bulk of the coders were Vietnam combat veterans and members of the Marine Corps.

The dependent variable -- combat effectiveness -- was measured by these same officers on a judgmental scale based on a six question survey instrument. Between 7 and 12 officers rated each engagement, based on random assignment. There proved to be very high agreement among the officers on the combat effectiveness ratings.

The data collected, including biographic information on officer coders to check for sources of bias, was subjected to a variety of bivariate and multivariate statistical analysis procedures ranging from Chi-square and Pearson product-moment correlation to multiple regression, factor analysis, and discriminant function analysis.

The major findings of the study were (a) that the command function composed of adaptive behavior and leadership, were the strongest predictors of combat effectiveness, (b) that creation of local superiority through the use of maneuver, fire, and supporting fires is the key to effective performance, (c) that intense (24 hours or longer) preparations, effective intelligence and planning, and tactical execution also show positive association with combat effectiveness. Some political and policy conditions also correlate with effectiveness and control of the size of the logistics tail is essential for effective performance. Specialized analyses were also performed to learn how units change over time in combat and how they react under conditions of severe shock and surprise. Validating analyses were also conducted to relate the research findings to the lessons learned in the 1973 Middle East War.

A special section of the report is devoted to improving the conduct of field exercises. Recommendations are made for alteration of the scenarios utilized and for changes in the Marine Corps Combat Readiness Evaluation System (MCCRES) based on the research findings. Finally, collection of data related to (a) adaptive behavior and (b) unit cohesion and individual discipline, is recommended.

**2 Volumes:**

**Technical Report  
Technical Appendix**

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